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INSIDE

Update on the Giant Strides of the Executive Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzondimma

Digital Heartland: A Roadmap for the Digital Transformation of Imo State



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Governor's Message

Since the last edition of the Imo Economy Digest in May 2023, we have made significant progress in the broad areas of health, digital economy, and rural economic development. I appreciate the collective efforts of the government, private sector, and our committed Imo people in making this happen.

One remarkable achievement within this period is the Health Insurance Scheme for Imo Indigenes. I feel satisfied to note that my government is funding the provision of free medical care in all the twenty-seven local government areas of Imo State. In addition to this, a proactive partnership between the State Government and the Association of Nigerian Physicians in America has made it possible for us to provide free healthcare and surgeries to Imo indigenes and residents. This initiative has not only improved the overall health and well-being of our people but has also significantly reduced the financial burden on families who previously struggled to access quality medical care. The partnership has also strengthened our healthcare system and amplifies the cogency for collaboration between our state and the diaspora community.

Our target is to train and equip 300,000 youths over a period for the emerging opportunities in a new global digital economy. Recall that the programme graduated 5,000 youths in January 2023. It recently graduated 15,000 more Imo youths in digital skills, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in a digital economy.

Our commitment to youth development through the SkillUpImo Project has continued to yield tremendous economic benefits for the State. Our target is to train and equip 300,000 youths over a period for the emerging opportunities in a new global digital economy. Recall that the programme graduated 5,000 youths in January 2023. It recently graduated 15,000 more Imo youths in digital skills, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in a digital economy. Another 40,000 will be enrolled before the end of this year. As a result, we have witnessed the emergence of innovative startups, freelance entrepreneurs, and a growing digital ecosystem that contributes to job creation and economic growth. The positive impact of this initiative extends beyond our borders, positioning Imo State as a hub for digital skills in Africa.

In line with our vision for rural economic development, the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI) my government launched this year has gained widespread recognition both nationally and internationally. This innovative framework, built on our strong socio-cultural values, emphasises collective efforts and unity within our communities. It has already begun to uplift the rural economy, empowering our people to create sustainable businesses and opportunities. We encourage our citizens and

In May 2023, I launched the Oguta Lake and Orashi River dredging project, which is deemed revolutionary as it will directly link the Imo economy to the blue economy of the Atlantic Ocean This will definitely open up Imo to the world, attract responsible investments, and create meaningful jobs!

businesses to embrace OKOBI and harness its potential for shared prosperity.

We have continued to prioritise our investment in infrastructure development. When the ongoing work on Owerri-Umuahia road is completed, the road will join the ranks of Owerri-Orlu, and Owerri-Okigwe roads as signature projects of my administration. In May 2023, I launched the Oguta Lake and Orashi River dredging project, which is deemed revolutionary as it will directly link the Imo economy to the blue economy of the Atlantic Ocean This will definitely open up Imo to the world, attract responsible investments, and create meaningful jobs!

In addition, we have made tremendous gains to restore peace and order in the State. As a government, we are committed to the protection of lives and properties. My administration, with its shared prosperity agenda, is working to bring positive change to Imo State. I am happy that this thinking aligns with the vision of our young people, as expressed in their essays in this edition. I hope you find them as inspiring as I did because we will not rest till our aims, objectives, visions, and dreams are achieved.

As we look ahead to the forthcoming elections, I want to assure the people of Imo State that my commitment to your well-being and the continued development of our state remains unwavering. The 3R agenda of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Recovery, which has come to define my government, is largely successful. However, I recognise the challenges we have faced and the aspirations of our citizens for even greater progress. Please be rest assured that we will work tirelessly to build on our achievements, address the remaining issues, and deliver on our promises, some of which are expressed in this edition.



On this note, I strongly endorse and recommend this edition of the Imo Economy Digest to you, as it showcases the achievements and aspirations of our great state. Let us move forward with HOPE, determination, and unity, for the best is yet to come.

Senator Hope Uzodimma, CON
Executive Governor, Imo State

EDITOR'SNOTE

Continuation of High Performance is Very Important!

I have the pleasure of presenting to you the fourth edition of the Imo Economy Digest from the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, Imo State Government. As usual, this edition is packed with interesting and exciting updates, since our May 2023 edition. It highlights some of the key achievements of the Imo State Governor, Senator Hope Uzodimma, in investments in infrastructure, health, digital, and rural economies. But don't just take our word for it. We encourage you to explore them for yourself.

Following the Governor's giant strides and their positive impacts on the State, we invited young people across Nigeria to co-create the future with us. This informed the essay competition on 'My Dream Imo in 2040', organised by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser in May this year. We are happy that ten of those essays have been published in this edition so that the public can appreciate and engage with the vision of young people for the State. The essays are enriching and thought provoking.



Following the Governor's giant strides and their positive impacts on the State, we invited young people across Nigeria to co-create the future with us.

On another note, the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI), which is now gaining momentum in Imo State and beyond, is a unique and original economic idea founded on the social structure of the 'umunna' of Ndi Igbo. Many communities are setting up businesses along the OKOBI framework and some existing businesses are aligning themselves to its economic potential. In this edition, I provide more insights on the import of OKOBI, its potential to unleash economic development, and the guidelines for setting up OKOBI businesses.



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This edition, like the ones before it, features some budding and well-established entrepreneurs. What is most exciting about the entrepreneurs covered in this edition is that two of them are home-grown young entrepreneurs. Marvellous Chisom Sunday is the Managing Director of FICHAA Solutions and Services, a cleaning company located in Owerri, which uses eco-friendly methods and sustainable materials to contribute to social and economic development. It is exciting to read how she spotted the opportunity and leveraged it. The other company, Greenera Technologies, co-founded by Mr. Gift Muoneke, the company's CEO, is providing electricity to Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) as well as individuals, using cheap and renewable solar technologies. It is particularly remarkable to note that their ongoing project powers markets and economic clusters without depending on public electricity sources in cheaper but sustainable ways. Both companies are profitable and provide jobs to some of the teeming population of Imo people.

All these have been brought to you in this edition for your reading pleasure and more. Please send all comments and suggestions to the editorial team to help us make the next edition even a better one.

Thank you!

Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
Editor-in-Chief



Update on the Giant Strides of the Executive Governor of Imo State

Senator Hope Uzodimma, CON



The second pillar is what is called solid infrastructure. Here again, Governor Uzodimma through a public-private partnership arrangement with Heartland Fiber Optic Company Limited has established the Heartland Consortium that will provide high-speed internet infrastructure to support current digital economy initiatives and enhance ease of doing business.

The year 2023 has witnessed remarkable developments in the digital economy, health, infrastructure, and rural economy in Imo State. By prioritizing these areas, the government of Senator Hope Uzodimma has demonstrated a keen awareness of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

The focus on digital skills training, in particular, is commendable, as it has helped to prepare the youth population of Imo State for the future of work. The Imo Digital Economy Agenda (IDEA) is anchored on six pillars. The first pillar is digital literacy and skills, the second pillar is what is called solid infrastructure, the third pillar is soft infrastructure, the fourth pillar is advocacy, the fifth is monitoring and evaluation and the last pillar is collaboration and partnership.

Under the first pillar of digital literacy and skills, Senator Hope Uzodimma's efforts to promote digital literacy and skills training for the youths are paying off, as evidenced by the large number of graduates from the program. So far, 20,000 youths have graduated and were equipped by the governor with tools of their trade. This success shows that the governor's initiative is effective and that the benefits of digital skills training are being realized. Not only are the graduates gaining valuable skills that will help them in their future careers, but they are also gaining a sense of empowerment and confidence that comes with being able to navigate the digital world. This is truly a testament to the governor's foresight and commitment to the future of the state.

The second pillar is what is called solid infrastructure. Here again, Governor Uzodimma through a public-private partnership arrangement with Heartland Fiber Optic Company Limited has established the Heartland Consortium that will provide high-speed internet infrastructure to support current digital economy initiatives and enhance ease of doing business. To this end, 3,000 kilometres of unified fibre duct infrastructure will be deployed across Imo State's major cities which when completed will lead to economic growth, the creation of jobs for the teeming youths through web-based business opportunities, and an improved digital economy.

In the area of collaboration and partnerships with private sector companies and organizations, the Imo State Ministry of Digital Economy and e-Government has secured working relationships with companies like Sisco, Google, Zinox, Konga and Wakanow. These relationships are essential for securing jobs for digitally skilled youths. These companies have the resources, expertise, and global reach to connect digitally skilled youths with job opportunities all over the world. In addition, they are now providing mentorship, guidance, and support to help Imo youths navigate the job market. By working together, the Imo State government, the private sector companies, and

digitally skilled youths are now creating a vibrant and thriving digital economy. This is a win-win for everyone involved.

In the health sector, Imo State has been bold and ambitious in pursuing its free healthcare services and in constructing and equipping modern and well-equipped rural hospitals bearing in mind that rural communities often face unique challenges when it comes to accessing quality healthcare. What we see in today's health sector is a determination to make sure that rural dwellers have access to the same level of care as their urban counterparts. Governor Uzodimma has shown enormous commitment towards addressing healthcare disparities and improving the lives of rural residents.

Three ultra-modern general hospitals have been completed and equipped with locations at Ohaji-Egbema, Oguta and Oru East local government areas. Health is a fundamental human right, and access to quality healthcare is essential for a thriving society.





In Imo State, the establishment of a new Ministry of Health Insurance by Governor Hope Uzodimma is a welcome development. Through the Imo State Health Insurance Agency, a parastatal under the Ministry, the Governor is currently expanding access to healthcare and making it more affordable. The governor's efforts have led to the improvement of the lives of countless people and made a real difference in rural areas. The recent figures show that 103,091 persons have been treated free of charge in the last six months. A second batch of enrolment is ongoing.

The free healthcare system for the poor and vulnerable has impacted positively on Imo rural women especially. Those who are poor, sick, and pregnant now have access to essential healthcare services that they could not otherwise be able to afford. This includes prenatal care, labour and delivery services, and postpartum care, all of which improve maternal and infant health outcomes. Additionally, the free healthcare services are helping to reduce financial stress and improve the quality of life for these women and their families.

A new teaching hospital for the Federal University of Technology, Owerri was also attracted by the Governor. This will bring numerous benefits for both medical students and the sick in Imo State and beyond. For medical students, it provides a unique opportunity to learn and gain experience in a real-world setting, with exposure to a wide range of medical conditions and procedures. This helps to prepare them for their future careers in medicine and gives them a competitive edge when it comes to finding jobs. For the sick, the new Federal University of Technology Teaching Hospital Owerri will provide access to cutting-edge medical care and the latest treatments. The hospital will also provide opportunities for participation in clinical trials and research.

The governor has continued to excel in infrastructure development. The approach road leading to the Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Airport, Owerri, is fully dualised with streetlights. Airfield lighting and night landing facilities, which are very important for airport safety and efficiency, are now being installed at Imo airport. For one thing, the airfield lighting will help safe landings, especially at night. This helps to prevent delays and cancellations and keeps passengers safe.

Another signature infrastructure project of the Uzodimma administration is the dredging of the Oguta Lake, and Orashi River into the Atlantic Ocean. This project meant to give access to the sea will have a major

impact on commerce in several ways. For one thing, it makes it easier for larger vessels to come into Imo State, leading to increased marine trade and economic activity. The dredging will also help to prevent flooding, by allowing for the removal of sediment and debris that can clog waterways. Finally, it can lead to improved water quality, as it allows for the removal of pollutants and other contaminants.

Governor Uzodimma equally received approval for an oil and gas free trade zone in the area and this will also bring several benefits to Imo State. First, it will attract investment and create jobs, both directly in the oil and gas industry and in related industries, which will boost the local economy and create economic opportunities for the people living in the area. The new free trade zone will attract new technologies and expertise, which can benefit the oil and gas industry and lead to increased efficiency and production. It will also lead to increased stability and security in the area.

Recently the Imo State Government, under the leadership of Senator Hope Uzodimma, launched the One Kindred, One Business Initiative (OKOBI). It is a beacon for rural economic empowerment, with a strong emphasis on job creation and shared prosperity. Its innovative approach has been acclaimed by renowned institutions like the London School of Economics. In addition, it has been a subject of discussion at EBS Business School Berlin, Germany, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and Leiden University, the Netherlands. At home, OKOBI has sparked enthusiasm among numerous individuals and groups, all eager to establish prosperous sustainable and lucrative joint business ventures. The initiative's ambitious goal is to facilitate the establishment of 5000 sustainable group-owned enterprises, each capable of employing at least 10 people, thereby providing gainful employment for over 50,000 Imo citizens in the coming year. OKOBI is seen as a uniquely transformative model from Africa for rural economic development with global recognition and acceptance with empowerment at its core.

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This update is provided by the Office of the Special Adviser to the Imo State Governor on Public Enlightenment.







100

Young Entrepreneurs sponsored and trained from Assa North - Obaji South Project's 11 host communities in Imo State (4 main host communities and 7 access road communities) as beneficiaries of Shell EntoWire entrepreneurship programme. One of the beneficiaries set up his business in 2020 and won the 2021 Development bank of Nigeria first prize Pitching competition to advance his business.



40

Community Youths benefit from specialized vocational and professional training. The beneficiaries from the Obaji/Egbema communities in Imo State acquired skills in project management, welding, fitting, scaffolding, rigging & lifting, electrical installations, electrical engineering & drafting, carpentry, building technology & drafting, ICT & telecoms, surveys, quality, and safety training.



18,000+

Adults and children received free medical care under the Community Health Insurance scheme (HealthInvestment) in the Assa North - Obaji South Project Communities.



COVID 19 Relief

COVID 19 Medical Relief donated to Imo State Government as part of Shell support to the communities including medical supplies, consumables, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and ambulances.

Employment Opportunities



Thousands of employment and subcontracting opportunities being created in the Imo State region to date.



80+

Community members have been beneficiaries of the Community Development Training to develop member's capacity in specialized areas such as Contract Management, Financial Management, Health, Safety, Security, Environment, Lifting and Hoisting and Electrical Safety.



20+

Community projects completed and ongoing in the host and access Communities of Assa North - Obaji South Project region. These projects include new additions and upgrade to schools, health post, townhall, markets etc. and were all executed via the Community Development Board (CDB) post the community needs assessment report.

Signature Infrastructure Projects

- Sustainable electrical power supply for the 4 host communities (Assa, Avaara, Obiti and Obiaji)
- Construction of Multi-Purpose Entrepreneurship Development Centre with over 275 capacity ICT/CBT Centre
- Construction and furnishing of 20 Bed Primary Health Care Facility
- Road Reconstruction 22km External Community Roads (Umuapu-Assa) and 7km community internal roads rehabilitation.

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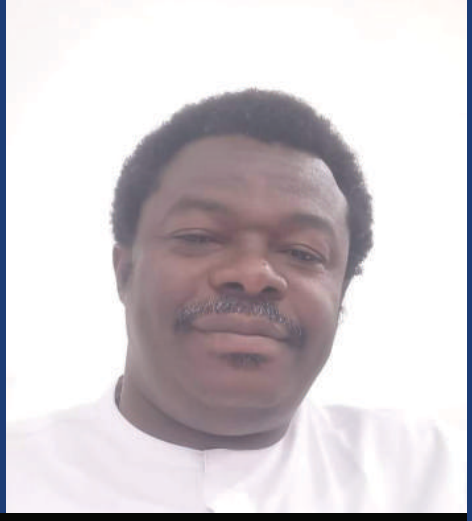


Dr. Uchenna Ewelike
Executive Secretary/CEO of the Imo State Health Insurance Agency



Health is Wealth

Focus on Imo State Health Insurance Agency

One remarkable achievement since the last edition of the Imo Economy Digest in May 2023 is the launch of the Imo Health Insurance Scheme by the government of Senator Hope Uzodimma. Through this scheme, the government funds the provision of free medical care in all the twenty-seven local government areas of Imo State. This initiative has not only improved the overall health and well-being of our people but has also significantly reduced the financial burden on families who previously struggled to access quality medical care. It is also a way of strengthening our healthcare system. In this edition, we bring to you an interview with the Executive Secretary/CEO of the Imo State Health Insurance Agency, Dr. Uchenna Ewelike, who spoke with Price Eze Ugochukwu, the Special Adviser to the Government of Imo State on Public Enlightenment.

Q: May we know you, Sir?
A: I am Uchenna Ewelike, MBBCh, PhD, the Executive Secretary/CEO of Imo State Health Insurance Agency. I am a Deputy Director with the National Health Insurance Authority Headquarters in Abuja, seconded to Imo State Government on the request of His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Governor of Imo State.

Q: What do you do at the Imo State Health Insurance Agency?
A: We ensure people of Imo State have access to quality healthcare services through health insurance. This way, they can avoid suffering financial hardships associated with out-of-pocket healthcare expenses.

Q: Health financing has always been an issue. How do we take away the burden of financing from the indigent citizens of the State?
A: A key objective of the Imo State Health Insurance Agency is to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure because out-of-pocket expenditure is very regressive. It can lead people into a vicious cycle of disease, poverty, and sometimes death. Our responsibility, therefore, is to ensure that people can access health care services without suffering financial hardship. That is currently what our programmes in Imo State are addressing and we have done a lot to demonstrate that. For example, we have a programme for the poor and vulnerable through the Basic Health Care Provision Fund which the Governor of Imo State flagged off at Ndubuisi Kanu Square on May 4, 2023. Though access to care started with 1.0 enrolment on April 3, 2023. Currently with 2.0 enrolment we have 84,926 people accessing healthcare in Imo and about 105,000 people have been treated free of charge in the last 6 months within the 305 INEC wards in Imo State.

Q: The government has a policy for all civil servants to get free medical services. How far have you implemented this policy and where can they access care?
A: Yes, His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, has a firm policy of financial risk protection for Imo State civil servants. We have concluded the enrolment of beneficiaries, and the Governor has also approved the premium. Shortly, each beneficiary will be allotted healthcare facilities and provision of services will commence. The health facilities are spread across the 27 LGAs, though we have more in Owerri due to the number of beneficiaries as well as referrals. However, since the LGA staff are included, we are in all LGAs.

Q: Do rural dwellers have access to this health insurance scheme?
A: Yes. What we are doing in Imo now is an affirmation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Alma-Ata declaration that says the Primary Health Centres (PHCs)



are the pivot of health systems. Today in Imo, the hitherto moribund PHCs have been reactivated and are a beehive of activities. We have adequate drugs and medical consumables in all the PHCs. These are made possible through the monthly capitation paid to the centres. Some facilities receive an average of N200,000 - N500, 000 monthly depending on the number of enrolees in the facility. Thus, it is important to know that we are in a new health financing era in Imo State.

Q: Do you offer free referral treatments at tertiary levels for the poor and vulnerable?

A: Yes, we do. Anyone that is a member of the Health Insurance Scheme and is on our database is eligible for treatment at whatever level even up to tertiary facilities. To buttress this fact, it will interest you to note that in the last 6 months, 219 surgical and specialist medical interventions have been carried out and fully paid for by the Agency in different public and private facilities in Imo State.

Q: I know that your Agency also has provisions for students. What does it look like in practice?

A: There is a Committee on the Tertiary Institutions Students Health Insurance Program (TISHIP), which includes people from the universities. The heads of medical teams in the universities are part of the committee. Currently for Imo State University, for example, a Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement is in place. There are providers who are interested in improving the level of service utilisation and quality of care. So, they are all part of it. One of the challenges we face in the TISHIP is that some students don't pay school fees when due and that reduces the number that we have on our database for TISHIP. But so far, the enrolment is encouraging as a lot of students have enrolled for TISHIP and are all accessing care currently at the Imo State University Hospital, for instance.

Q: Are private hospitals, and other private sector healthcare providers factored in your service delivery framework?

A: All our facilities are accredited by the National Health Insurance Authority. They include public and private facilities who must sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with IMSHIA. This is according to global best practices in health insurance.

Q: What are the requirements for enrolling as a beneficiary of this health insurance at the rural poor level, students' level, and civil service levels?

A: For the Basic Health Care Provision Fund we are implementing at the rural areas, eligibility is for pregnant women, children under 5, elderly and very poor residents. We have laid down parameters to measure poverty as eligibility criteria. For Civil servants, the database is from Imo State Data Management Agency and validated by the Office of the Head of Service. On Tertiary Institutions Social Health Insurance Programme, eligibility is admission into any of the State-owned tertiary institutions.

Q: How much do the beneficiaries pay and how often?

A: Our programme for the poor and vulnerable is free, that of the civil servants is paid by Imo State Government, and TISHIP is N2, 500 per student per academic year, while our unique programme for those in the Informal Sector called ImoCare is N15, 000 per person per annum valid for a family of four.

Q: Are there sufficient public enlightenment campaigns aimed at mobilizing people to buy into the scheme?

A: There is no end to social mobilisation and awareness to health insurance, but we are doing our best based on the available resources to get the media involved in all our programmes.

Q: Finally, what are your thoughts about the journey in driving this programme here in Imo State?

A: We are excited about the possibilities of the scheme. We are optimistic about the future provided that there is the needed political will for implementation. The Uzodimma administration has done very well in providing this and we are quite hopefully it will continue to be, going forward.



Dr. Anthony Christian Mgbeahuruike
Honourable Commissioner for Livestock Development, Imo State.

We Say No to Anthrax

On the recent free Statewide Mass Vaccination of Grazing Animals for enhanced public health in Imo Sate.

An interview with Dr. Anthony Christian Mgbeahuruike, the Honourable Commissioner for Livestock Development, Imo State.

The Executive Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodimma, recently approved and implemented a free statewide mass vaccination of animals in Imo State to prevent the spread of anthrax – a deadly disease – to the State. Our editorial team met with Dr. Anthony Christian Mgbeahuruike, the Honourable Commissioner for Livestock Development to get more information about this timely intervention.

Q: Please, may we know you?

A: I am Dr Anthony Christian Mgbeahuruike from Ahiazu Mbaise LGA, Imo State. I got my first degree in Veterinary Medicine (DVM) from the University of Nigeria Nsukka and a Masters degree in Animal Nutrition and Health from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala. My PhD was in Mycology from the University of Helsinki Finland. I am a researcher and an academic with the University of Nigeria Nsukka. My research is mainly on animal health with specific interest in fungal mycotoxin in feed and the effect on the general wellbeing of animals. Through our research on adsorbents, we have able to provide practical solutions to mycotoxicosis in animals caused by contaminated animal feeds and we have also been able to identify different fungal agents involved in mycotoxicosis in animals using various genomic tools and other molecular approaches. I have over 35 scholarly publications in this area. Currently, I am the Commissioner for Livestock Development, Imo state since the 20th of December 2021.

Q: What are the plan and activities of the Ministry of Livestock Development under your leadership?

A: A key plan of the ministry is to enhance livestock production, ensure food safety and create food security for Imo people and beyond. Since I assumed this role, we have achieved a lot in this regard. We have consistently provided Imo people with birds as source of food and meat through our farm at Acharaubo in Owerri North. We are also rearing pigs there and the pigs have all reached market size. In the area of food safety, we are constructing one of the biggest abattoirs in Nigeria at Naze Owerri where animals that are served to Imo people as meat are inspected, butchered, and processed under very good sanitary conditions for human consumption, courtesy of our dear Governor, His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma. We have attracted World Bank Projects (Livestock Productivity and Resilient Support Programme-LPRES) which is designed to better the lives of Imo people especially the rural populace through Livestock Production. This project was facilitated by our Governor, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma. Our numerous Livestock activities also help to boost revenue generation for the state, for example, our poultry production and sales, meat inspection at the abattoirs and farm inspections



are different revenue generating means for the State. We are also into farmers' education through the help of our extension workers. The Ministry has also trained Imo youths in livestock farming and different livestock production inputs have been supplied to farmers since my assumption of office. In prevention of emergent public health diseases, the Ministry has had yearly anti-rabies campaigns in conjunction with the Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association (NVMA), and presently, the Ministry is carrying out a statewide mass vaccination of grazing animals against anthrax outbreak to protect the Imo people against the disease.

Q: What is the background to the recent public health intervention by the Imo State Government through your Ministry?

A: In June this year, there was an outbreak of anthrax in certain states in Nigeria. States like Niger and Lagos had confirmed cases of the disease, while Kogi and Plateau had cases that were not confirmed to be anthrax related. This outbreak led to the death of many animals in the affected states and the loss of over N600,000,000 to the economy. Given the interconnectedness of Imo State to the other parts of Nigeria and its associated trans boundary diseases, it was obvious that this disease could easily spread to Imo State and negatively impact on our economy and public health. To forestall these happening, the Executive Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodimma, proactively approved and implemented a free statewide mass vaccination of grazing animals in Imo State.

Q: What do we know about Anthrax and how deadly is it?

A: Anthrax is a zoonotic disease caused by a spore forming bacterium known as Bacillus anthracis, which primarily affects animals but can also infect humans who come in direct contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products such as meat, wool or hides and skin. The animal species affected by this disease are mainly cattle, sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, horses and wildlife, and other animals such as pigs.
Some of the ways the disease could be transmitted to animals and humans include grazing on contaminated soil or through ingestion of contaminated water, while in humans, the transmission is usually through direct contact with carcasses of infected animals, contaminated animal products, and consumption of under-cooked or uncooked meat as well as drinking of raw milk from infected animals or by inhalation of Bacillus anthracis spores.

Q: What are the symptoms in affected animals and humans?

A: Some of the symptoms in affected animals include sudden death without any signs of illness, blood flowing from natural orifices (body openings) of the affected animals without any tendency of clotting, e.g., nose, ear, and mouth. In addition, the carcass of an infected animal becomes bloated and shows no sign of rigor mortis after death. In humans, the symptoms depend on the mode of transmission of the disease. The symptoms may begin to manifest in 1-8 weeks with flu like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, muscle aches, catarrh and body weakness, chest discomfort and difficulty in breathing. The severity of these symptoms depends on the form of anthrax one is infected with, which may be cutaneous, pulmonary,

gastrointestinal or injection form. One of the physical signs of the cutaneous form is a skin scar with a dark spot on the scar.

Q: What are the measures for dealing with anthrax?

A: Major precautionary measures and health tips on awareness creation on the anthrax disease outbreak include not touching any animal that dies suddenly with blood flowing from the natural orifices. Furthermore, people are warned not to process or move dead or sick animals into the abattoir for slaughter and promptly report all such cases to the authorities such as veterinary clinics/hospital whether private or government owned and in the same vein, in the case of suspected human infection, seek prompt medical attention if the person develops suggestive symptoms after contact with animals. Other preventive measures include (i) avoiding contact with sick or dead animals and their products, (ii) avoiding slaughtering of sick animals which may expose the anthrax spores for inhalation by humans and (iii) not eating product from dead or sick animals and ensuring proper cooking of meat before eating.

Q: What has the Imo State Government done?

A: To tackle anthrax disease in Imo State, the government rolled out a free statewide vaccination of animals, as a preventive measure against the disease. I led this initiative in partnership with the Imo State Chapter of the Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association (NVMA) through the support of His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Executive Governor of Imo State. The other preventive measures put in place by the hard working team of veterinary experts include (i) the intensification of meat inspection at the abattoirs to ensure that contaminated meat is not passed on to Imo people, (ii) proper Inspection of animals coming into the state at different entry points, (iii) meeting with different livestock farmers and dealers including the Miyetti Allah for proper sensitization of Imo people, and (iv) radio interviews, jingles and press conferences for awareness creation and several others.

Q: What is your advice to the public?

A: I enjoin all farmers, herders, and all animal owners to avail their animals for the vaccination exercise that has kicked off in earnest and will span weeks across the communities. In short, we all need to join hands with the team of Veterinary Doctors that are visiting the communities for the vaccination of animals to secure Imo against anthrax disease, because my indefatigable team and I say no to anthrax. However, this will not be achieved without the critical support

To tackle anthrax disease in Imo State, the government rolled out a free statewide vaccination of animals, as a preventive measure against the disease. I led this initiative in partnership with the Imo State Chapter of the Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association (NVMA) through the support of His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Executive Governor of Imo State.



of our key stakeholders. As such, I thank the Governor, Senator Hope Uzodimma, who defied all odds against the prevailing economic circumstances by not only making provisions for the programme to take place but also ensuring that Imolites are protected and saved from the anthrax disease. I also extend my very profound gratitude to the Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association (NVMA) Imo State Chapter and the private veterinary practitioners in the state for being part of the programme.

Thank you for your time!

Office of the Chief Economic Adviser
Governor's Office

GOODWILL MESSAGE

TO HIS EXCELLENCY SENATOR HOPE UZODIMMA, CON

Your Excellency,

Your unwavering commitment to the welfare of Ndi Imo and your remarkable achievements in steering the affairs of our beloved state have not gone unnoticed. You have truly embodied the qualities of a devoted servant-leader in your pragmatic approach to governance.

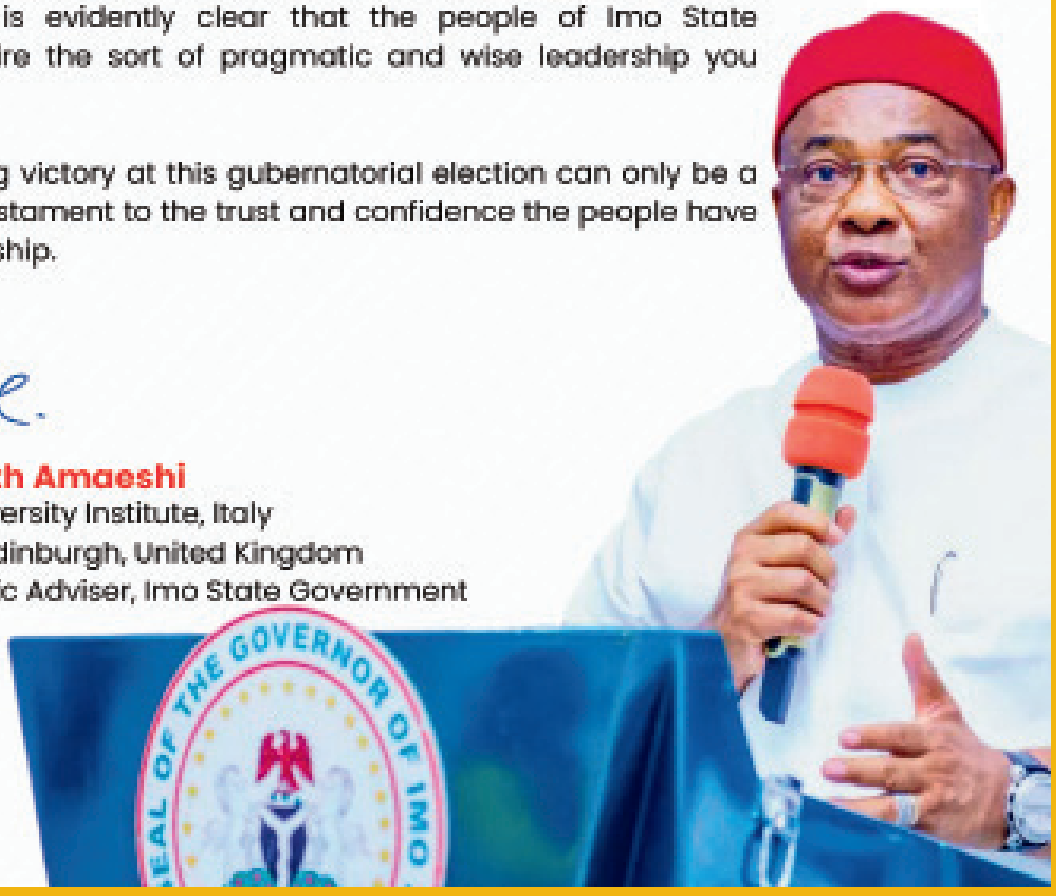
In addition, your emergence as the Chairman of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Governors' Forum and the Chairman of the South East Governors' Forum, amongst other national awards and assignments, is a great testimony of your leadership.

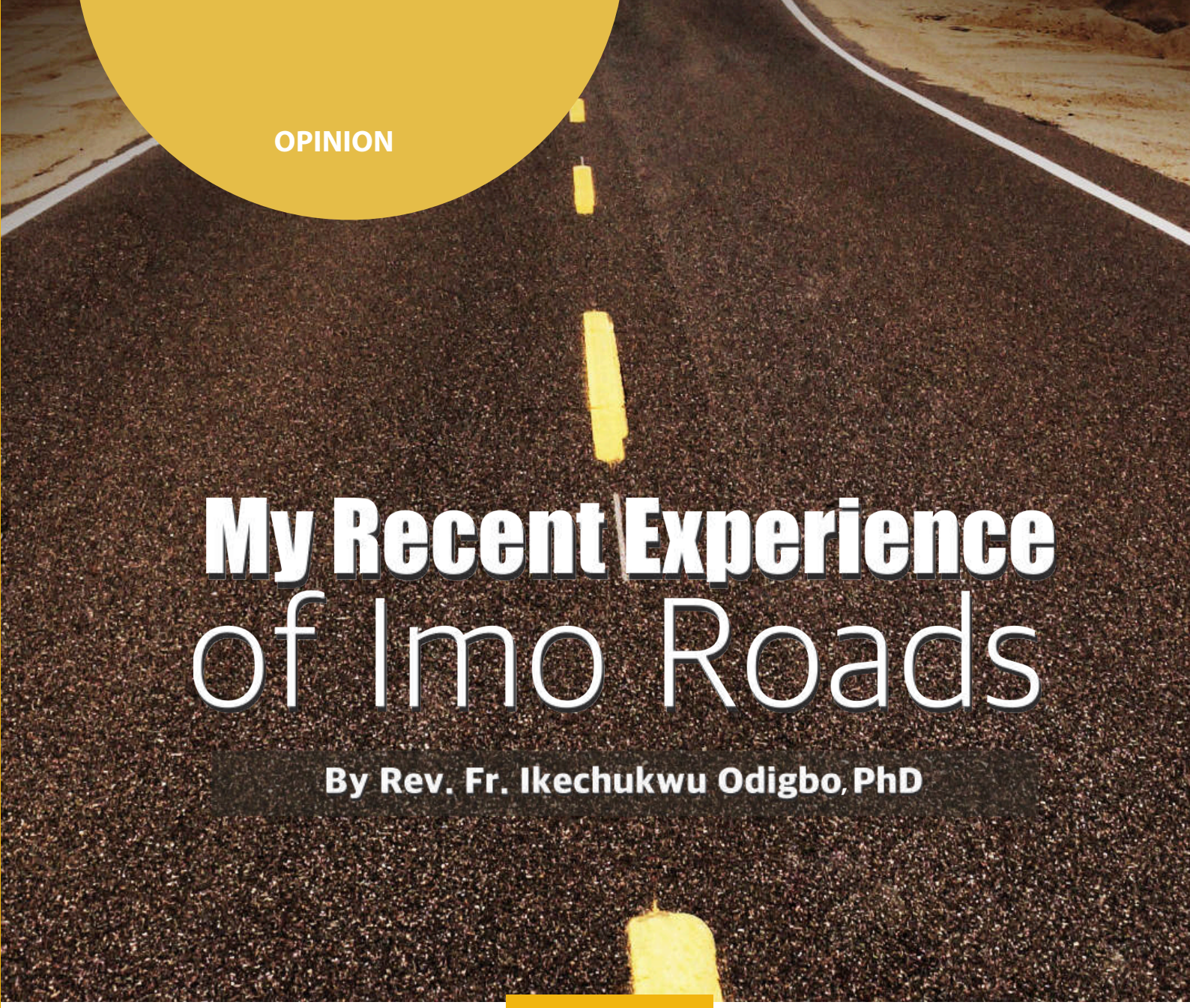
As the forthcoming State elections on **November 11, 2023**, approach, it is evidently clear that the people of Imo State earnestly desire the sort of pragmatic and wise leadership you offer.

Your deserving victory at this gubernatorial election can only be a resounding testament to the trust and confidence the people have in your leadership.

Best wishes!

Prof. Kenneth Amaeshi
European University Institute, Italy
University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Chief Economic Adviser, Imo State Government





My Recent Experience of Imo Roads

By Rev. Fr. Ikechukwu Odigbo, PhD

I recently drove from Enugu to Amaraku near Owerri for the funeral of Mrs. Livina Ajaero, my friend's mother. When I arrived at Okigwe junction, I stopped to refuel my car because I expected a long and bumpy drive. My last experience of driving to Owerri through Okigwe in 2019 was hellish, so I considered other options like going via Umuahia Tower or even via Ubakala Junction on the Aba-Owerri axis. I asked the petrol station manager which road was best among the three options open to me. He suggested Okigwe Road. At first, I did not believe him, but on a second thought, I chose to take his advice.

My experience of that road was unbelievable. I could not recognise the Okigwe Road I knew very well because it is now well-paved clear and clean. I cruised effortlessly up to Anara Junction and onwards to Amaraku. Not even a single pot-hole. It took me less than thirty minutes. I couldn't believe it. Then I went into Amaraku for the vigil Mass and other activities for the night. Another surprise was awaiting me as I left Amaraku for Owerri by 10pm. The road was adorned on the side by street lights which illuminated my path as I drove along until I got into the city. Again, I couldn't believe the transformation.

This was my personal experience and I am happy that the Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodimma, has paved the Okigwe Road – a road which was so bad for a very long time. Seeing is believing is a good philosophy to live by. In the politics of Nigeria today, this subtle skepticism provides one with a safety-net against propaganda

Do you know the economic impact of this single road project stretching from Okigwe Junction into Owerri? Many communities will be opened up, to move around more conveniently and to move their agricultural produce and handiwork to the markets.

and offensive lies. I never believe the stories of 'I have done this; I have done that' of Nigerian politicians. The reason is simple. Politicians thrive on outrageous exaggerations. Many of the claims are either totally untrue or mere half-truths.

So, seeing this very long road suddenly turned-around aroused in me sentiments of joy and gratitude. I believe that any government that provides as much as the basic things will get the people's appreciation. Do you know the economic impact of this single road project stretching from Okigwe Junction into Owerri? Many communities will be opened up, to move around more conveniently and to move their agricultural produce and handiwork to the markets. Properties along that route will significantly appreciate. Less time will be wasted on the road and therefore more productivity will be recorded. Less damages to cars and other mobility means. Moreover, accidents caused by bad roads will be reduced. The spiral effects of this single road are enormous.

Naturally I spent more time that night with my friends talking about infrastructure in Imo State. And then, it came up that the Orlu road was equally done and was even more beautiful. And that the Owerri-Mbaise road was also being done. What? So, when the funeral was over two days later I decided to return to Enugu via Orlu to see for myself. It was another beauty to behold. This time it is a dual-carriage way, all paved with drainages. I could drive closing my eyes until I got into Orlu where the new road stopped.

Going through Orlu town reminded me of the ugly past and the nasty bumps. I managed to get through Orlu town and continued till Akokwa and into Anambra enroute Enugu. Hopefully the governor will complete the reconstruction of that Orlu road all through to connect Anambra. If he does, he would have achieved what generations upon generations of politicians in Imo State could not do with hundreds of billions of Naira. I am very grateful what he has done on the roads. I enjoyed it myself and am sure many other people using the roads are also grateful to him.

I give this personal testimony because it is a first-hand experience, which is why I said earlier that seeing is believing. Make no mistake about it, there are a lot of deception and lies in Nigerian politics. As a young man then in Enugu, politicians betrayed my trust. I have





Many of the farm produce cannot be moved to the market. Many of the vehicles, private and commercial, break down too often caused by the excessive stress to which they are subjected by bad roads.

seen stories of pipe-borne water project in the state launched on TV with a coterie of politicians speaking big grammar and cutting tapes. The TV taps are decked with ribbons running profusely and the governor smiling garishly announcing his achievements to the world. But it is all a ruse because the tap in front of my house on the streets and other places except on TV were as dry as stone. Am sure many Nigerians have similar experiences of political deception.

One may ask, why recognise the governor in this way since he has simply done his job? Moreover, he did not use his personal resources to build the roads. This is a fair question and concern. The corollary to this question and concern is to ask what would have happened if he chose the ways of previous administrations before him? In my opinion, it is good to recognise good results and resist bad outcomes. As much as many politicians come across as untrustworthy, some good examples should be recognised and encouraged. It is only when we start to publicly condemn their bad behaviours and celebrate their good behaviours that some of them might begin to see the goodness in being good to the people they are elected to serve.

If governors in South East or indeed any other part of Nigeria could do their work like building roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, they could pull many people out of poverty. In Igboland, particularly, as enterprising as they are, lack of good roads undermines their entrepreneurial abilities. This is easy to understand. Many of the farm produce cannot be moved to the market. Many of the vehicles, private and commercial, break down too often caused by the excessive stress to which they are subjected by bad roads. The little income that they generate from their "hustle" fizzle away in towing vans and repairs. Not to talk of the people who refuse to engage in these activities for the obvious fact that there is no access to their sites of production.

Perhaps, when the three major connecting roads into Owerri have been completed, the governor would have given to Imo people what they truly deserve and are entitled to as of right. I can only say thank you to the governor and ask him to do more, especially in the area of insecurity, which has become a big challenge for the entire South East and Nigeria. I pray for grace and profound peace.



Ikechukwu Mathias Odigbo PhD is a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu and a commentator on public issues. He lives in Enugu and can be reached via his email: i.m.odigbo@gmail.com



The Hope Uzodimma I NEVER KNEW

By MacDonald Ebere, PhD

Senator Hope Uzodimma is truly an enigma. The more you think you know him, the less likely you are to understand him. I have known him for over 20 years, yet in the last 44 months he has shown a different side of him I never knew. He is never short of surprises, and I will tell you why.

When Senator Hope Uzodimma resumed as the Executive Governor of Imo State, he took his time to understand the State. Where others saw only turmoil and deprivation, he recognised the boundless ingenuity and tenacity of Imo people and applied an extraordinary pragmatic and visionary leadership to rebuild the State. His three-pronged agenda of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Recovery of Imo State summaries his mission with credible surprises.

In healthcare, for example, Uzodimma has tremendously granted access to quality and affordable healthcare to many Imolites. Through a strategic partnership with the World Health Organization, he created and implemented the Imo Health Insurance Programme. This has enabled over 66,000 Imo residents to obtain healthcare protection. Concurrently, strategic investments are augmenting primary healthcare infrastructure across the state to further expand and enhance access and availability of vital services for rural and urban communities.

Uzodimma is an astute and foresighted entrepreneur. His bold step to dredge and link Oguta lake to the Atlantic Ocean, and therefrom create a vibrant Orashi economy, which will house a large Oil and Gas Export Processing Zone, is both extraordinary and historic. He has also demonstrated his entrepreneurial prowess through the revival of hitherto moribund industries in Imo State such as Adapalm and Acharaugbo Farms. He rescued Imo Standard Shoes Company and completely paid off the Asset Management Company of Nigeria (AMCON) loan that was a big burden on the company. Through his leadership, Imo State is included in the Special Agro-industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) in Africa, a programme initiated by the African Development Bank. He recently approved the sum of N5b as soft loans targeted at the farmers in Imo State.

If not for his doggedness and courage in curtailing and containing the insecurity challenges that confronted the State in the last couple of years, some of the achievements of his administration would have been limited. But Uzodimma carefully saved Imo from this onslaught, fought the detractors of the State gallantly, and wisely thwarted their nefarious plans.

Imo is back to business and business is back to Imo. The Imo hospitality sector is thriving. The night economy is booming, and investment interests are growing. In August this year alone, the Imo State government hosted several interested investors from South Korea and Thailand, just to mention but a few.

His ambitious digital programme to train 300,000 Imo youths on digital skills and link up to relevant jobs (i.e., the SkillupImo project) is unmatched in Africa. It is also an innovative way of creating jobs for young people and indirectly overcoming the challenges of insecurity, as unemployment and poverty are usually strong ingredients for fermenting insecurity. Today, over 5,000 young Ndi Imo have already completed the training and are either leveraging their heightened technical acumen to establish promising digital ventures or securing employment with leading tech firms like Zinox, Konga, and WakaNow among other digitally driven businesses within and beyond Imo. Currently, 20,000 young people have commenced the second phase of the programme.

Governor Uzodimma has implemented prudent investments in strategic new constructions and diligent rehabilitation of dilapidated routes to cultivate state-wide road connectivity. His administration has constructed 64 roads spanning over 150 kilometres while the rehabilitation of another 43 routes accounting for over 350 kilometres is ongoing in both urban and rural areas. The revived road networks now constitute indispensable conduits energising the flow of goods and services, reducing transport costs, and linking rural areas to vital market centres which are key for improved sustainable socioeconomic integration.

To put things in a coherent intellectual framework, he meticulously crafted and developed the Imo State Sustainable Industrialisation Policy in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) – arguably the first of its kind in the history of Imo State. The policy identifies existing and emerging subsectors intentionally selected for their potential as economic engines to propel job creation and engender broad-based prosperity. Enshrined in the policy's vision - "Making Industries Work for All Imo People" - is an unswerving commitment to inclusive participation, with mechanisms to guarantee equitable access to markets for communities across the state. The idea is to enable Imo State harness her potentials for localised sustainable industrialisation an inclusive manner.

In his pragmatic nature, he championed the innovative One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI), which epitomises his approach to grassroot development, rooted in Umunnanomics philosophy. This imaginative programme fosters sustainable entrepreneurship by exposing extended family units or "kindreds" to the economic benefits of establishing successfully run group-owned enterprises which are aligned with their indigenous interests, passions, capabilities, and resources. And many communities have successfully embraced the idea. For example, the Amaimo community recently registered their Akuyoma cooperative focused on financing local entrepreneurs, and the Emii community registered their New Emii cooperative that is into agriculture.



Governor Uzodimma has implemented prudent investments in strategic new constructions and diligent rehabilitation of dilapidated routes to cultivate state-wide road connectivity.







In addition to transforming lives within local communities, OKOBI has other wider socioeconomic benefits. First and foremost, it offers government a mechanism to formalise grassroot microenterprises, enabling them to access finance, technologies, and markets for expansion and possibly converting them into big businesses. Aggregated, these micro-ventures can energise broad-based growth and enlarge the state's revenue base.

What do these achievements really say about the man, Uzodimma? It is obvious that when he came into office, expectations were very low and basic at best. Some people expected him to embrace patronage and transactional politics over enacting substantive investments to empower the people. But it is clear they underestimated him, as they have been disappointed.

Rather than succumb to cheap quick fixes, Governor Uzodimma embraced an audacious vision to emancipate Imo human capital by addressing the systemic roots of disempowerment. He spurned superficial handouts in favour of profound empowerment programmes. Unlike some politicians who would leverage transient appeasements to secure their next elections, Governor Uzodimma adopts a tenacious long view. He understands that transformative change requires pragmatic investments in healthcare, infrastructure, education, skills, and economic opportunities.

In 44 months, Uzodimma has redefined leadership in Imo beyond belief. He has awakened a bold vision that spurs on Imo's rejuvenation by implementing policies designed to enrich lives across the state. His work of restoring hope in Imo has only just begun, but the fruits are already evident. To unleash broad-based growth and sustainable development, Imo needs continuity in the sort of visionary leadership Uzodimma offers.

Uzodimma has proved himself a transformative force with a very result-oriented and extensive socio-political network and capital. Notwithstanding, transforming entrenched systems takes time and continuity. To do this, Governor Uzodimma will soon launch the Imo State Sustainable Development Plan (2024-2034), which will herald his bold, inclusive, and broad vision for Imo State beyond his tenure. It is instructive to note that such a detailed and extensive plan has not been seen in Imo State.

With this, I am convinced that Imo's diamond may be rough, but its brilliance cannot be denied with Governor Uzodimma's progressive leadership. The path forward is clear. Imo State is ready, but the State needs someone like Uzodimma who is getting things done to the surprise and admiration of some people who never gave him a chance.

It is obvious that Governor Uzodimma is a passionate man on a divine mission. That he has been able to achieve a lot in such a short time, despite the difficulties and challenges reassures me that there is a lot more I can learn about this unusual performer.



MacDonald Ebere, an expert in practical political philosophy, writes from Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Congratulations

DR. DORIS UZOKA-ANITE

on your appointment as Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Best wishes from,



Prof. Kenneth Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh
Chief Economic Adviser to
Imo State Government



Transforming Imo State's RURAL ECONOMY: A Vision for 2040[1]

By Johnson Chukwuemeka Anoruo

Imo State, located in southeastern Nigeria, is blessed with vast agricultural resources and rural communities that form the backbone of its economy. This essay aims to present a vision of my dream Imo State by 2040, where the rural economy flourishes, leading to widespread prosperity and development. The rural economy in Imo State is currently facing various challenges and limitations. Limited access to infrastructure, including roads and electricity, hampers the transportation of goods and services. Insufficient funding and access to credit restrict the growth and expansion of rural enterprises. Furthermore, the lack of modern technology and limited market access hinder innovation and market competitiveness. Despite these challenges, Imo State possesses inherent opportunities and strengths that can be leveraged for future growth. The state boasts of abundant natural resources, a vibrant agricultural sector with fertile land, suitable climate conditions, and a skilled workforce.

Vision for Imo State's Rural Economy by 2040

My vision for Imo State in 2040 is a thriving rural economy marked by flourishing agriculture, interconnected value chains, and vibrant enterprises. The key elements include increased productivity, seamless market access, technological advancements, sustainability, and youth empowerment. Goals include higher agricultural output, a diversified economy, and empowered communities. Achieving this vision entails leveraging agricultural resources,

[1]This article is one of the two winners in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organised in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here has very little editorial corrections.

empowering the youth, investing in infrastructure, fostering technological innovation, improving finance access, and promoting environmental conservation, among others. Let us take these points one by one.

1. Leveraging Agricultural Resources

Imo State's agricultural revolution aims to unlock the potential of its fertile land through modernization and diversification. By embracing sustainable practices like organic farming and agroforestry, the goal is to achieve productivity while preserving the environment. Crop diversification and support for high-value cash crops empower farmers, enhancing their income and benefiting the local economy. The development of infrastructure, including irrigation systems, roads, and storage facilities, ensures efficient farming operations and minimizes post-harvest losses. This comprehensive approach cultivates a sustainable agricultural sector that serves as a stronghold for rural economic development in Imo State.

2. Empowering Young People

Empowering Imo State's youth is key to igniting a prosperous rural economy. By providing access to education, training, and resources, we can nurture their skills and unlock their potential as drivers of growth. Creating job opportunities in agriculture and related sectors, fostering entrepreneurship, and offering funding and mentorship programmes will attract and retain young talents in rural areas. This investment in youth will not only reduce rural-urban migration but also fuel the thriving rural economy of Imo State, where economic development and community empowerment go hand in hand. Together, let us pave the way for a brighter future by empowering the leaders of tomorrow.

3. Developing Appropriate, Resilient, and Sustainable Infrastructure

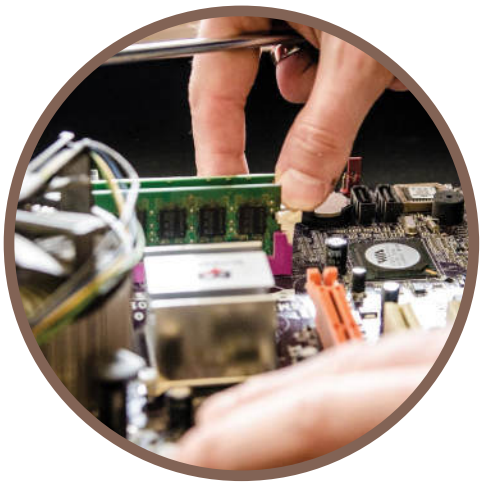
Imo State recognises the vital role of infrastructure in driving rural prosperity. By investing in roads, bridges, and transportation systems, the state facilitates the smooth movement of goods and services, opening new opportunities for rural communities. Access to reliable electricity, water, and telecommunications networks attracts businesses and investors, while modern markets and storage facilities optimise the value chain and minimise losses. Through this transformative journey, Imo State lays the foundation for economic growth, where infrastructure serves as the gateway to prosperity, connecting communities and fostering success.











4. Enhancing Technology and Innovation

Imo State is set to undergo a remarkable rural transformation through technology and innovation. By establishing broadband infrastructure and leveraging e-commerce platforms, farmers will directly connect with consumers, leading to enhanced market access. Moreover, the integration of farm management systems, precision agriculture, IoT devices, data analytics, and mobile banking services will optimise resource utilisation, reduce costs, and improve productivity. This digital revolution will empower rural communities, propel them into the digital age, and create a prosperous future for Imo State.

5. Improving Access to Finance and Credit

Access to finance is a vital catalyst for rural prosperity in Imo State. By providing small businesses with the necessary capital, they can expand their operations, enhance productivity, and create jobs, leading to overall economic growth. With financial support, entrepreneurs can invest in new technologies, acquire equipment, and hire more staff. This will enable them to compete effectively in local and global markets. Additionally, access to finance offers resilience during economic downturns and opportunities for expansion during periods of growth. By nurturing this connection, Imo State can witness a flourishing rural landscape, where businesses thrive, communities prosper, and a bright future unfolds.

6. Conserving Natural Resources

Imo State is dedicated to nurturing its natural resources for sustainable rural prosperity. Through visionary policies and practices, the heartland aims to conserve and responsibly utilise land, water, and forests. By promoting value-added industries like agro-processing and eco-tourism, Imo State generates jobs and income while preserving the environment. The state also prioritises research and development to discover innovative and sustainable ways to leverage its resources. This commitment positions Imo State as a global leader in eco-consciousness, ensuring a prosperous and harmonious future for rural communities and the environment.

Tracking implementation and performance: What milestones are required for these goals?

The first milestone is to increase the number of value-added industries in rural areas by 20% by 2025, creating at least 10,000 new jobs. This can be achieved through policies that promote entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas, as well as investments in infrastructure and access to finance.



The second milestone is to increase the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices among smallholder farmers by 30% by 2027, resulting in increased crop yields and improved soil health. This can be achieved through training programmes, extension services, and incentives that encourage farmers to adopt sustainable practices.

The third milestone is to establish at least five eco-tourism sites in rural areas by 2030, attracting at least 50,000 visitors annually and generating significant revenue for local communities. This can be achieved through investments in tourism infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement.

The fourth milestone is to increase the proportion of renewable energy sources used in rural areas to 50% by 2033, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and promoting environmental sustainability. This can be achieved through policies that promote renewable energy development, as well as investments in energy infrastructure and technology.

The fifth milestone is to achieve a 50% reduction in deforestation rates in rural areas by 2035 through effective conservation policies and sustainable land use practices. This can be achieved through policies that promote sustainable forestry practices, as well as investments in forest conservation and restoration.

The sixth milestone is to increase access to basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and clean water in rural areas by 2038, improving the quality of life for rural communities and attracting more investment. This can be achieved through investments in infrastructure development and maintenance, as well as policies that promote private sector investment in rural areas.



I envision a rural economy that has overcome its challenges and unlocked its true potential. Infrastructure is no longer a barrier, as roads and electricity networks crisscross the state, facilitating seamless transportation and connectivity. Adequate funding and accessible credit empower rural enterprises to thrive and expand, fuelling economic growth.

Overall, these milestones represent an ambitious vision for rural development that prioritises economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. Achieving these milestones will require strong leadership, effective policies, and sustained investments over the long term.

Imo State by 2040: A Vision of a Thriving and Sustainable Rural Economy

In my dream for Imo State in 2040, I envision a rural economy that has overcome its challenges and unlocked its true potential. Infrastructure is no longer a barrier, as roads and electricity networks crisscross







Furthermore, the empowerment of rural communities is a central tenet of this vision. Young people are provided with quality education and training, equipping them with the skills needed to excel in various sectors.

the state, facilitating seamless transportation and connectivity. Adequate funding and accessible credit empower rural enterprises to thrive and expand, fuelling economic growth.

Innovative technology boosts Imo State's agriculture, attracting investment and creating value-added products. Sustainability takes centre stage, with renewable energy and responsible land management driving eco-tourism and economic growth.

Furthermore, the empowerment of rural communities is a central tenet of this vision. Young people are provided with quality education and training, equipping them with the skills needed to excel in various sectors. Entrepreneurship is encouraged, and support mechanisms such as mentorship programmes and access to finance nurture the growth of rural enterprises. The resulting job opportunities uplift communities, reduce poverty, and enhance living standards.

Imo State's rural economy holds the promise of a prosperous future. By creating jobs, prioritising inclusivity, and improving living standards, we can reduce poverty and inequality. Establishing dedicated agencies, setting indicators, and implementing monitoring systems will drive progress. In my vision for 2040, Imo State's rural economy is a vibrant force, fostering overall development. With collective efforts, targeted investments, and sustainable practices, we can unlock its immense potential. This dream will bring prosperity and transform lives, making Imo State a model of rural economic success. Let us remain optimistic and committed to turning this vision into reality.



About the Author
Johnson Chukwuemeka Anoruo is a first-year student of Industrial Chemistry at the Federal University of Technology Owerri.

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Developing the Rural Communities of Imo State[1]



By Damian David Chidera

The rural economy is of great importance to Imo State, and it should be taken seriously for several reasons. Firstly, agriculture is obviously a major component of the rural economy. It is also one of the largest employers of labour in the state, providing employment opportunities for a significant proportion of the population. Neglecting the rural economy could lead to loss of jobs and a rise in the already disturbing unemployment rate in the state. Secondly, the rural economy is critical to ensuring food security in the state, as most of the state's food production takes place in rural areas. Developing the rural economy will help to increase food production, thereby reducing the risk of food shortages and inflation. Finally, the rural economy is essential for poverty reduction because many people living in rural areas of Imo State depend on the rural economy for their livelihood. Therefore, it is vital for the state government to invest in the development of rural economy to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and ensure food security in the state.

Located in southeastern Nigeria, Imo State has a population exceeding 4 million people, distributed across 27 Local Governments Areas. The three most populous cities in Imo State, arranged in decreasing order, are Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe. Imo is widely recognised for its abundant agricultural resources, with most of its population involved in farming or trading. Being in the tropical rainforest area, a significant number of rural communities in Imo State rely on agriculture as their primary source of income. However, the rural economy of Imo State is plagued with challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient funding, low productivity, and inadequate mechanization. This essay seeks to explore methods of enhancing the rural economy through the industrialization of its farmlands.

[1]This article won one of the two 1st Runners-up in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here has very minimal editorial corrections.

One of the most significant steps to improving the rural economy of Imo State is by investing in infrastructure. It is a known fact that development via infrastructure is a generally slow process in rural communities in Nigeria. But if the rural economy in Imo State is going to improve by a significant metric, there should be substantial investments in infrastructure and the state government may wish to prioritise the construction of roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure. This will help improve transportation networks to facilitate the movement of produce from the rural areas to the market. If there is no enabling infrastructure for farmers, the transportation and movement of produce will be slower, riskier, and ultimately more expensive. Such a situation will hamper growth of the rural economy.

Additionally, electricity and water supply are important to enhance productivity in the rural areas. Electricity is needed in various farming activities like irrigation, incubation, refrigeration, milking machines, drying of produce, shelling of fruits and seeds, making of animal feed, grinding, and mixing. Without access to reliable electricity, these processes will either not be practised or will be carried out inefficiently. The farm produce might be transferred to the city thereby hindering the growth and development of the rural economy.

Education and training of farmers and investors present another viable means to boost the rural economy of Imo State. To enhance agricultural produce, it is important to train farmers in rural areas on modern farming techniques, such as crop rotation, soil conservation, mixed farming and pest/weed management. The state government can partner with universities and agricultural institutions such as the University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (UAES), Imo State University (IMSU), Imo State University Teaching Hospital (IMSUTH) and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) to offer training and provide extension services to farmers within the rural communities. This training and extension services could also be incorporated into the curricula of agricultural-related departments in these institutions, requiring students in related fields to actively engage with their local communities for the transfer of skills.



Additionally, electricity and water supply are important to enhance productivity in the rural areas. Electricity is needed in various farming activities like irrigation, incubation, refrigeration, milking machines, drying of produce, shelling of fruits and seeds, making of animal feed, grinding, and mixing.

Furthermore, the state government can support rural entrepreneurship, especially in agriculture, by providing access to finance and credit facilities. The government can establish cooperative societies and microfinance banks to provide affordable credit facilities to small-scale farmers since current lack of access to finance hinder their operations. However, this is why education and training as aforementioned is necessary if this part of the vision is to materialise. It is useless to provide credit facilities and funds if the farmers do not have the knowledge to use them





effectively and efficiently. Therefore, while finance and credit facilities are essential, education, awareness, and training beforehand to prevent mismanagement and misplaced priorities with these credit facilities and finance are also important.

The rural areas in Imo State could experience a boost in their economy through the development of agro-processing industries. The state government can encourage companies to establish themselves in these communities by providing incentives to the companies, such as access to land and a percentage of farm produce profits. The development of agro-processing industries in rural areas will help farmers to add value to their produce and subsequently increase their income. I believe this initiative will lead to what I call "the industrialization of farmlands in Imo State rural communities". To maximise the output of this initiative, it is crucial that research be made to determine the local governments that grow and produce each crop best.

For example, if Orlu LGA (or any community therein) is known for producing more egusi than other LGAs, an agro-processing industry should better be located there to improve the area's egusi output and its related value-chain. This will also enhance egusi production and its transportation to markets within or outside the state. As a result of this development, Orlu LGA, for instance, will obviously have the cheapest egusi available that will drive patronage from all around the country. This will lead to an improved rural economy that will facilitate gradual investments and developments in the area.

In addition, the state government can explore opportunities for partnerships with international development agencies to support rural development programmes. International development agencies can provide funding, technical assistance, and expertise to support the development of the rural economy in Imo State. If the proposed initiative is effectively implemented and sustained, it could make it easier for the state government to secure partnerships with national and international organisations. This will in turn lead to the industrialisation of farmlands in Imo State rural communities with the establishment of these agro-processing industries, and will in turn boost the rural economy. Once partnerships are established, the state government will no longer need to solely finance farming operations in the rural areas since these organisations can provide substantial resources. This could even lead to the urbanisation of rural communities in Imo State.



Finally, the state government could prioritise the development of rural healthcare and education. This is extremely important as many rural communities in Imo State lack access to basic healthcare services and quality education. Improving healthcare and education in rural areas will not only help to attract young people to farming and reduce rural-urban migration, but it will also help mitigate unhealthy and unproductive farming practices.

Orlu Local Government Area provides a perfect example of the benefits of prioritising rural healthcare and education. The recent development of the Imo State University Teaching Hospital (IMSUTH) in Orlu has attracted investors and entrepreneurs from across the state, driving economic growth in the local area. There is a gradual but consistent growth of real estate, road networks and other infrastructure in Orlu LGA because of the presence of Imo State University Teaching Hospital (IMSUTH). If similar infrastructure is established in other local governments through healthcare or education, it will undoubtedly promote development and improve the rural communities' economy. This way, communities can learn modern farming practices to drive production and efficiency and even facilitate urbanization.



...improving the rural economy of Imo State requires a multi-faceted approach. This approach includes investing in infrastructure, education, training, healthcare, promoting agro-processing industries, ensuring access to finance, and collaborating with international development agencies.

To conclude, improving the rural economy of Imo State requires a multi-faceted approach. This approach includes investing in infrastructure, education, training, healthcare, promoting agro-processing industries, ensuring access to finance, and collaborating with international development agencies. The state government should work in close collaboration with rural communities and other stakeholders to create and implement effective policies and programmes that support sustainable rural development. Starting development from the grassroots level is the most efficient approach. Not only will this improve and enhance the rural economy, but it will also significantly enhance the economy and infrastructure of Imo State as a whole, which is part of my vision for Imo State by 2040.



About the author

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Digital Heartland
- A Roadmap for the Digital Transformation of Imo State[1]

By Nnamdi Ifechi-Fred

During a Mandarin class one Autumn morning during my postgraduate days at Peking University, China, my lecturer explained why pork is widely consumed in China. She said that because, historically, the weather of the areas that now make up modern China could not support cattle rearing, pigs were reared for commerce and pork was served as a signifier of high status in society. I tell this story to show that historical conditions are critical in shaping countries' and city-states' contemporary socioeconomic characteristics and features.

In Nigeria's Southeastern region, the evolution of historical conditions is reflected in the current economic patterns. Anambra has assumed the position of (heavy) manufacturing and industry leader. Abia's Ariaria market and small-scale manufacturers have become a commercial hub for light manufacturing and trade. Ebonyi remains the food basket. In a perfect world, Enugu will dominate extractives with its coal mines. Imo, on its own, stands out as the hospitality and services leader in the East.

Economic theory tells us that countries and states should double down on their comparative advantages and build specialisation. Specialisation, in this case, means building on the unique pre-existing economic arrangements and features that will turn each Southeast State into centres of excellence that can create jobs, increase incomes, and engender economic growth.

[1]This article won the first position in the essay completion "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State in May 2023. What you read here has some very minor editorial corrections.

This essay outlines a developmental vision for Imo State to become a digital technology and services hub in the Southeast and South-South. Digital technology has proven to be a powerful force around the world. So, instead of Imo continuing with low-value services, it can work towards a digital transformation that turns it into a tech hub. This has been the story of countries and city-states like Estonia, Dubai, and Taiwan. These territories have population numbers similar to Imo State except for Taiwan, with a population of 23 million.

The next section will discuss why Imo State should choose this path and how to turn the dream into reality.

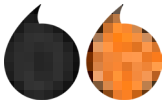
The imperative for digital Heartland

Imo State is known as The Eastern Heartland, hence the name "Digital Heartland." The Digital Heartland dream can be captured as "an Imo State with a thriving and robust digital economy that promotes world-class digital entrepreneurship and digital public services delivery before the end of this decade (2030)".

The World Bank estimates that mobile technologies and services created over $4.5 trillion of economic value in 2021. This amount gives a sense of the size of the global digital economy. If Imo State takes deliberate steps to achieve the Digital Heartland dream, it can take a share of this economic value and create wealth for its residents and the whole of Nigeria. This is the primary imperative for choosing this development pathway.

Few macro-sectors have been able to create widespread wealth as the digital economy/technology. Companies like Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, and Amazon have created wealth for founders, employees, investors and even the cities in which they operate. A simple look at the World's wealthiest people also shows the economic potential of digital technology and the importance of digital entrepreneurship. The Digital Heartland will be an Imo State where innovative startups will create thousands of decent, high-paying jobs. These startups will also create significant valuations and create shared prosperity. Imo State will also be the preferred location for young people in the South-South and Southeast to launch their technology companies and solve financial services, agriculture, healthcare, commerce, and transportation challenges. The Digital Heartland will also champion technology transfer as it will create the environment for cross-pollination and spread of digital technology from advanced countries and technology ecosystems to the Southeast and Nigeria.





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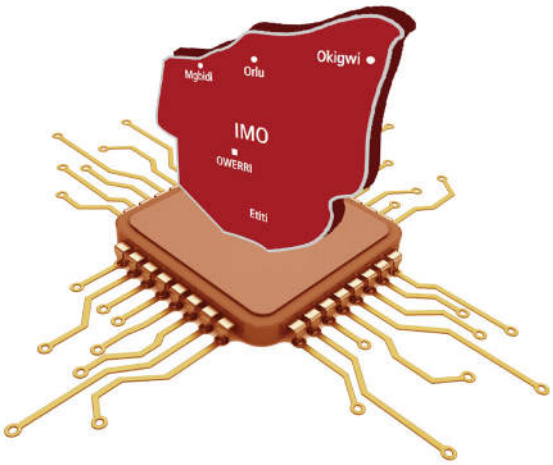

The Digital Heartland will however be about more than just digital entrepreneurship. It will also leverage on digital technology for public service delivery.

The Digital Heartland will however be about more than just digital entrepreneurship. It will also leverage on digital technology for public service delivery. Using technology for public service delivery like tax collection and utility payments within the State increases efficiency, reduces the risk of corruption and embezzlement, enables the executive to oversee public sector operations properly and reduces costs in the long term. The government will be popular in Digital Heartland because it will win increased approval from Imolites by making their lives easier and more convenient. Introducing more technology will turn Imo into a "city of the future" similar to Wakanda in the popular Marvel franchise – Black Panther. Estonia, a small European country, provides an excellent example of digital public service delivery. The country leads Europe in digital government, and most of its services, like voting and entire government operations, are done digitally. In the digital Heartland, Imolites will pay taxes digitally, get information from the government online and even buy tickets for the electric public transportation system on their mobile phones.

Achieving the digital Heartland means Imo State will be a thriving ground for digital businesses that create jobs and shared wealth. It also makes it easy for its residents to interface with the State government's efficient public service delivery.

Making the dream a reality

It is easy to dream, but dreams that would become a reality must be accompanied by a plan to actualise them. While one essay cannot be deemed sufficient to advise a government on the steps for such an arduous and complex endeavour, I will attempt a high-level approach to achieving the digital Heartland.

Imo State government will need to pursue initiatives around some of the pillars of the digital economy – digital infrastructure, digital skills, digital entrepreneurship and digital government. Internet connectivity is the basis for digital technology; Imo State must build or enable private sector players to build telecommunication and internet infrastructure. One way to make this a reality is by reducing the right-of-way charges that telecommunications and internet service providers need to pay to lay cables and build towers. Lagos State did this for MainOne in Yaba, which allowed MainOne to lay cables that

contributed to the increased availability of high-speed internet for high-growth digital technology companies (startups).

At the same time, the State needs to invest in equipping its youth with technology skills such as computer programming, web development, product development including User interface and experience, cyber security, data analysis, and computer design. These skills are necessary to create a talent pool to form a pipeline for companies and attract them to operate in Imo State. The tech ecosystem in Nigeria needs more skilled mid-level talent. Imo State can partner with tech training companies like Decagon to train young Imo residents with tech skills and match them with companies. Edo State of Nigeria is taking a similar approach and intends to be the hub for tech talent in Nigeria. This will create a talent pool of young people who can work for international companies while living in the state and for startups that situate their operations within the state.

But the state can take a big step towards a digital Heartland by making it easy for tech companies to register businesses in the State. The State can also attract startups by providing financial incentives (grant funding), co-working spaces and incubators in designated tech parks to interested entrepreneurs with brilliant ideas or those already building innovative digital products and solutions. For example, new Owerri can be designated as the startups' nucleus where startups can be situated and from which they can expand across the state and country. Through the Lagos Innovates initiative, the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund provides entrepreneurs access to workspaces and infrastructure for their businesses.

Finally, Imo State should engage big tech corporates and startups to build relevant solutions and products that can be deployed for engaging with its residents and revenue collection, what I call low-hanging use cases. As Imo residents constantly interact with the government through digital channels, they will become more accustomed to a digital government. More advanced use cases can be introduced to digital public platforms in time.



Final words

Making the Digital Heartland a reality is a net positive for Imo State and the Southeast. As noted in the introduction, specialisation is the starting point for creating regional centres of excellence. As a digital technology centre of excellence, Imo State can serve as the breeding ground for startups that develop solutions to developmental challenges across agriculture, healthcare, transportation, energy and education. These startups will also create jobs for the teeming Imo youth and stimulate the local economy. Finally, the Value Added Tax (VAT) and income taxes will increase government IGR.

But to make this a reality, the government will need to pursue this with commitment and creativity. The government needs to take bold steps and pace itself, as this dream will require some time before it can become a reality. Still, as this article outlines, it is a worthy cause and has the potential to transform the State's economic structure and make it one of the most viable sub-national economies in Nigeria.



About the author

Nnamdi works as a digital economy analyst and researcher. He has dual degrees in Economics from top global universities and experience in international development advisory. He is interested in how public policy can be leveraged to deepen digitization and harness technology to achieve economic development outcomes.

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Transforming Imo State Through Good Housing and Creation of New Cities: My Imo 2040 Dream[1]

By Joseph Efe

I once had a dream and, in this dream, I was reading through the Imo Economy Digest. As I flipped through the pages, I saw pictures of architecturally eccentric housing systems, buildings, road networks and estates; a culturally diverse exhibit of practical engineering intellect, one where modern technology were integrated into Imo's cultural identity in housing and cities development. This was exactly what I wanted for Imo by 2040. As always, I captured those moments clearly in my brain like a photo and later wrote them in a notebook where I keep ideas.

The profound transformations of the housing and cities landscape in Imo - echoed the evolution of urban design, architectural innovation, and technological progress. Faced with a burgeoning population and rapid urban expansion, Imo State's housing sector orchestrated ingenious responses to demands, crafting forward-looking solutions that encompass sustainable and state-of-the-art residential structures tailored to the diverse preferences of its residents.

The housing complexes and road networks in Imo State stood out for their exceptional blend of intelligence and connectivity. With the quick development of technology, Imo had integrated smart home technologies into its housing constructions in major economic hubs in Owerri and Orlu which improved convenience, security, and comfort.

Housing structures were built utilising barrier-free design principles which ensured everyone could access them, irrespective of age, degree of accessibility, or level of mobility. Homes were well equipped with wider doors, ramps, and grab-bars to accommodate older and disabled occupants' needs, fostering inclusive living environments that were secure and cozy for everyone.

[1] This article won one of the ten 2nd Runners-Up positions in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here has some minor editorial corrections.

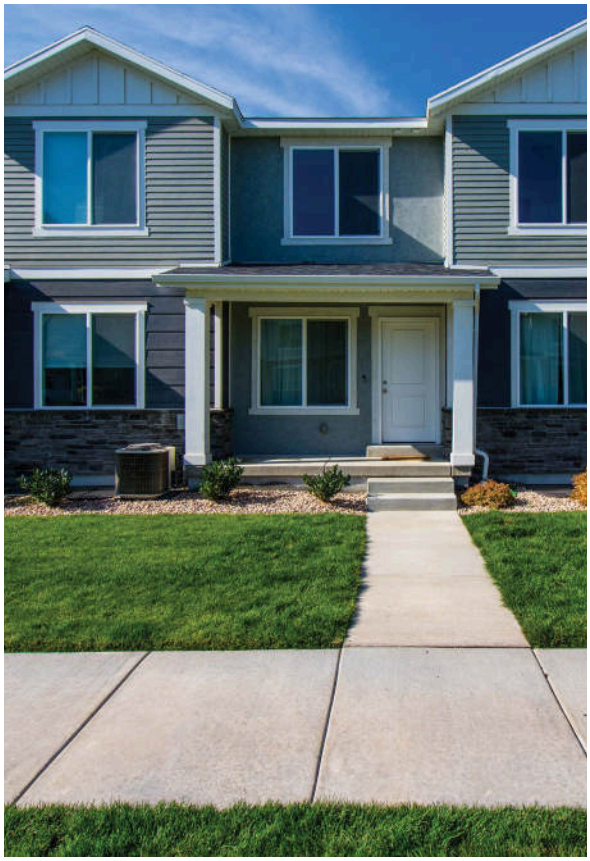
Building complexes in dense locations in Imo incorporated multipurpose community centres that offered venues for social meetings, cultural events, and recreational activities, establishing a thriving and welcoming neighbourhood spirit. To increase housing affordability and accessibility for a larger population, the government worked with private developers to offer subsidies, tax breaks, and other financial incentives.

All major structures were also built with resilience and preparedness for emergencies in mind. When building dwelling structures, climate change and natural catastrophes were considered. To reduce the dangers posed by extreme weather events, measures like reinforced foundations, storm-resistant materials, and effective drainage systems were put in place especially in Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Ngor Okpala, Owerri West, Owerri North, Aboh Mbaise and Owerri Municipal LGAs identified as very high flood areas as well as Mbaitolu, Ikeduru, Onuimo, Ihite/Uboma, Obowo and Ehime Mbano LGAs identified as moderate flood hazard areas. Furthermore, to give refuge during emergencies and ensure the safety and wellbeing of locals, emergency shelters were also placed in susceptible places in a strategic manner.

Building complexes in dense locations in Imo incorporated multipurpose community centres that offered venues for social meetings, cultural events, and recreational activities, establishing a thriving and welcoming neighbourhood spirit.

Imo State, renowned for its extensive cultural past included regional architectural designs, building materials, and design cues which were in keeping with the community. Houses were designed with native culture and traditions. Local architecture, patterns of space, and social institutions were included into designs to assist the inhabitants feel a sense of ownership and community. Furthermore, apart from





Heroes' Square and Imo Hall of Fame there were other buildings constructed at Ezinihitte one of which was called Imo's Museum of Heritage which displayed an array of textile works, terra-cotta, masks, brass works and statues of past heroes and governors. This created a sense of culture, oneness and fostered social cohesion among Imolites.

Ngor-Okpala formerly known to be a rural settlement witnessed changes in its housing and road structures through creation of affordable buildings which were a mix of detached and semi-detached homes, apartments, and townhouses fashioned in manners which were energy-efficient, equipped with modern amenities and designed with green spaces. In addition, sustainable building materials like bamboo, recycled steels, and low-carbon concretes were used in constructions, lowering the carbon footprint, and fostering a circular economy.

Sustainability, solar energy, rainwater collection systems, and garbage disposal techniques were at the heart of large-scale estate construction at Ngor-Okpala to encourage eco-friendly living. The designs also tried to combine cultural and traditional aspects, expressing the distinct identity of the Ngor-Okpala people, and fostering a sense of communal ownership.



Owerri the capital of Imo received special consideration in the redevelopment plan. Priority was given to building affordable housing in key urban areas to accommodate the city's growing population and deal with the housing shortage. The government focused on creating high-density housing structures to accommodate the growing population. High-rise apartment buildings and condominiums were built to cater for the needs of middle and low-income earners. The government introduced a rent-to-own and a pay-as-you-go scheme to make housing more accessible to low-income earners, who often struggle to secure decent accommodations in the urban areas.

The government also invested in the redevelopment of some of the city's landmark buildings, such as the Owerri City Stadium and the Owerri Mall. The redevelopment of these landmarks was aimed at boosting tourism in the city and creating employment opportunities for the residents.

Moving to Orlu, one of Imo State's major commercial and economic centres, the government focused on developing low-density housing structures, such as bungalows and duplexes to cater for the needs of the high-income earners in the area while ensuring that the structures were sustainable and affordable. The buildings were situated close to commercial areas, markets, and other amenities to encourage economic and business activities.

The government invested in the preservation and redevelopment of Imo State's tourism centres such as the Mbari Cultural and Art Centres, and the Eze Imo Palace, which were important tourist attractions, to boost tourism and create employment opportunities for the residents. One of the new cities developed was the Avu New City. It featured luxurious homes with modern amenities such as swimming pools, fitness centres, and high-end security systems. The Avu New City was strategically located near major business districts, making it an attractive location for the affluent.

Owerri North New City was also developed by the government. This city was designed to cater to the middle-income group in the state and featured a mix of residential and commercial properties, including affordable apartments, townhouses, warehouses, and commercial spaces.

In Okigwe, the government through private investors offered the local population quality and inexpensive housing options. Priority was given to the construction of affordable housing units. These

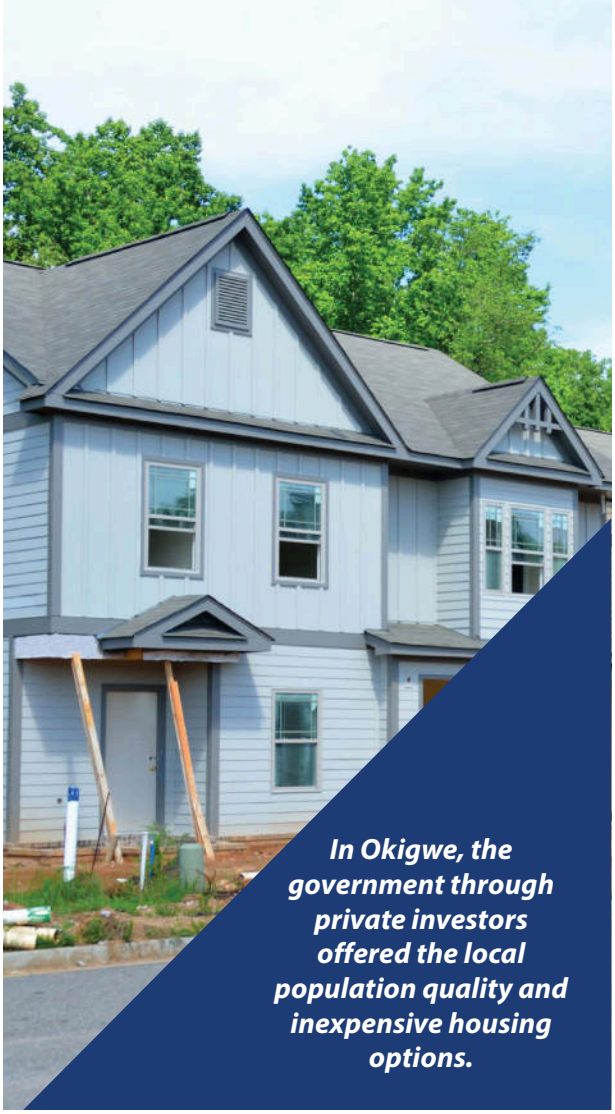
units were created to meet the needs of a variety of income earners. They were carefully placed close to transportation hubs and recreation centres to improve the occupants' quality of life.

Obowo which was a remote location with few housing alternatives had witnessed drastic development through the cheap housing units in the local community. To foster community growth and improve the quality of life for the people, these housing units were created to accommodate low-income families and were situated adjacent to important resources including markets, healthcare centres, and schools.

Ohaji/Egbema was not overlooked. This area, known for its vast oil and gas resources, was a hub for industrial and economic growth. The development of high-rise apartments and terrace houses were prioritised to cater to the influx of professionals and expatriates that would be attracted to the booming industries. At the same time, there was a need for affordable housing for low-income earners which resided in the area therefore, the development of bungalows and duplexes were also prioritized.

The Oguta Lake and the Oguta Amusement Park were as well given special attention in the development plans as they were refurbished to ensure that they remained tourist attractions and sources of revenue for the State. Road networks linking these cities employed multiple integrated public transportation infrastructure, such as railways, buses, and bike lanes, to promote sustainable mobility alternatives while reducing reliance on private automobiles as well as creating pedestrian-friendly roadways to promote active transportation and lower carbon emissions.

In Oru East, Ideato North and South, Nkwere and Ikeduru, housing units were built with a focus on inclusivity, featuring elements like accessibility for people with disabilities, gender-sensitive design, and common areas. Structures built were duplexes, bungalows, and apartments to cater to the different income levels and preferences of the people. The duplexes were designed for families that preferred larger living spaces and wanted a yard for gardening and other outdoor activities. Bungalows were designed for the elderly and those who preferred single-story living spaces. The apartments were designed for young adults and students who preferred a more communal living space. These dwelling units also had rainwater collection systems, renewable energy sources, and other eco-friendly features to reduce carbon emissions on the environment and improved the quality of life for the occupants.



In Okigwe, the government through private investors offered the local population quality and inexpensive housing options.

This dream Imo state was birthed from the important and close work between the government and local stakeholders, including communities, architects, engineers, and policy makers, which ensured that Imo became the cynosure of all eyes just like her slogan "Eastern Heartland".



About the Author

Joseph Efe is a 300-level medical student of the University of Benin, Edo state. He is an opinion writer and a firm believer in the power of words to illuminate and change society. Besides reading, his hobbies include networking, taking long walks, watching movies and thoughtful reflection.

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My Dream for Electricity In Imo State by 2040[1]



By Blessing Udokang

Have you ever wondered what made Martin Luther King Jr so bold about his dream America? Because the last time I peeked into his kind of mind through the windows of his "I have a dream speech", I immediately understood the power of dreaming. So today I dare to dream of the Imo state I want to see by 2040 when ELECTRICITY should no longer be a farfetched experience, especially in the rural parts of the state, but a source of actual illumination to both the young and old people of the area. I dream of a 2040 Imo where electricity is an illumination of hope for a continuously improved standard of living, as well as a power source of the state's economic development.

Indeed, I have a dream, so strong that by 2040, there will be no dark streets or corners due to the lack of electricity. There will be no limit to what the doctors and nurses, especially in the rural areas of Imo state can do for patients in the hospital because of limited or poor power supply. That even for the farmer, there will be no hikes in the price of processing farm produce, as generators which use non-renewable energy sources are still in place. Rather, prices will remain stable if renewable energy sources such as sun or wave energy are used for processing farm produce. There will be no reason for a student to not effectively do his/her school assignments, carry out research or read in preparation for examinations due to power outage. I dream of uninterrupted power supply in every nook and

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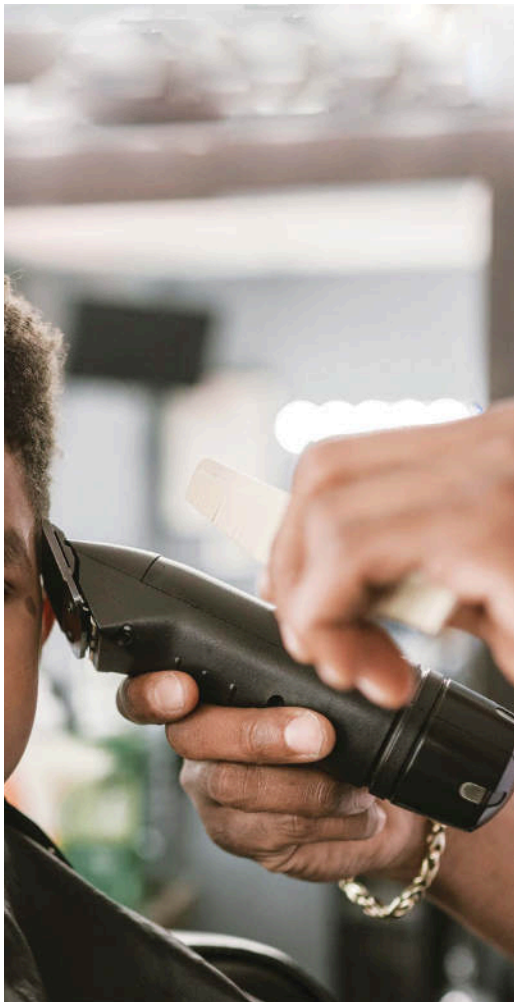
For the entrepreneurs in Imo State for instance, electricity would mean a source of power for the barber's clipper to function in giving his customer a perfect haircut. For the kiosk owner, the light aspect of electricity is paramount to at least see and serve customers well.

Electricity and its uses

Electricity is a form of energy that can be carried by wires. It is used for lighting, heating, and powering. And even though basic, this definition explains why an improved state of electricity will lead to an increased economic development for Imo state. However, electricity means different things to different people each time. For the entrepreneurs in Imo State for instance, electricity would mean a source of power for the barber's clipper to function in giving his customer a perfect haircut. For the kiosk owner, the light aspect of electricity is paramount to at least see and serve customers well. Whereas for the big industries, it will mean an avenue to power machines which are either used for processing or production of respective products.

Furthermore, I would say that it is apt to highlight how electricity is and will continue to be very instrumental to the economic development of our dear Imo State. Since economic development has everything to do with programmes, policies or activities that





seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life of a people, then whatever can power the continuous engagement in such activities should be consistently improved on.

When electricity is improved on, there will be easy workflow for people who are running either small- or large-scale businesses that will add a quota to the economic development of the society. Such ease in workflow could come by simply charging a device low in battery to access a piece of information needed at that moment to accomplish a task and land a particular result. And now, these results can in turn give rise to employment opportunities.



To start with, our society will be heading towards rapid economic development by promoting public-private partnerships in the state through proper consideration and adoption of innovative ideas brought by such initiatives.

Challenges for consideration and improvement

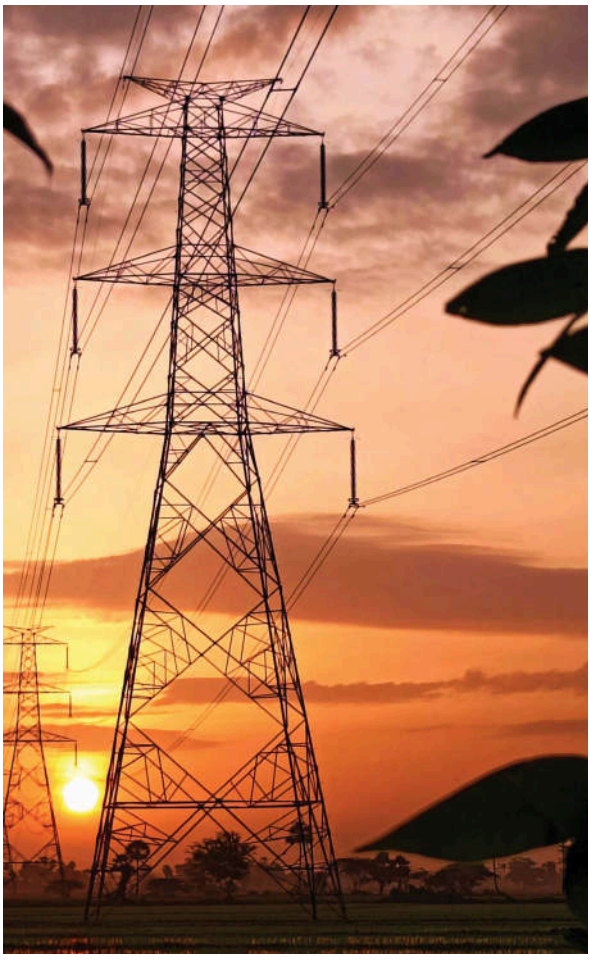
I strongly believe that if my dream Imo State must be in sight by 2040, then electricity-related factors should be given proper attention, either by innovation or improvement where respectively necessary. To start with, our society will be heading towards rapid economic development by promoting public-private partnerships in the state through proper consideration and adoption of innovative ideas brought by such initiatives. Undoubtedly, no man is an island of knowledge. The government might not know all of the new technologies that can aid the smooth running of the electricity sector of the state, but by opening avenues of public-private partnerships with companies or even research institutions, innovation of electrical technologies can be brought home. This does not only



start and end with just innovation but goes further into promoting investment and acceleration of the adoption of some new or foreign technologies as well.

Take for instance, a production company that cannot function effectively with the current power grid system in the state will benefit from adopting improved technology. Allowing such companies to operate, or simply put - collaborating with such a company will be a plus to the state. And this is because, if there is a favourable regulatory and investment environment that encourages such collaborations, there will eventually be an upgrade of the power grid to a smart grid system that in turn makes the availability and distribution of electricity reliable for indigenes and residents of Imo State.

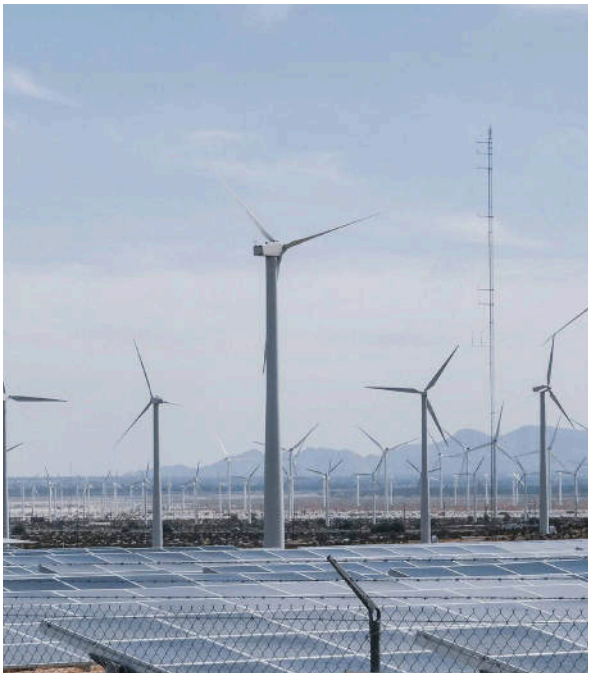
Next, to live in the dream Imo State, the transmission and distribution of electricity would be advanced in 2040 using a smart grid system. This can improve the efficiency and reliability of electricity delivery, reduce outages, and enable the integration of renewable energy sources. Since an electrical grid is an interconnected network for electricity delivery from power plants to homes or consumers generally, it means that it largely determines the availability of electricity in all parts of the state. And in a case where the grid resilience is not improved, the grid sensitivity will remain high due to atmospheric disturbances such as lighting, wind, and rainstorms. However, updating high-voltage transmission infrastructure, building power lines underground, keeping a power reserve in plants all to modernize, strengthen and stabilize our power grids can salvage insufficient and unreliable electricity availability. Upgrading the power grid to a smart grid system can be achieved by deploying advanced sensors, communication, and automation technologies that can detect and respond to changes in energy demand and supply in real-time. The use of smart sensors for example, can provide real-time data and status of the grids for real-time monitoring, protection, and control of grid operations. And this will not only speed detection and support alarms that may deter intruders but will also mitigate equipment damage generally.





...updating high-voltage transmission infrastructure, building power lines underground, keeping a power reserve in plants all to modernize, strengthen and stabilize our power grids can salvage insufficient and unreliable electricity availability.

Third, another way of improving development in Imo State and enjoying economic development through the electricity route is by deploying renewable energy sources. This is so because they can naturally replenish themselves for continuous use, being inexhaustible in nature. This can provide a sustainable and cost-effective solution for meeting energy demands while reducing the greenhouse gas emissions. Some of these renewable sources include solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, and biomass energy types. As such, investing in renewable energy sources can help to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and increase the availability and reliability of electricity in Imo State. This approach will encourage more economic activities seeing that it will aid considerable reduction in electricity tariff for the consumers.





Some practical ways of investing in these renewable sources can be the state government buying equities or bonds of electricity or utility companies supplying energy or of the companies making components for equipment that are needed to generate power. This can also be achieved or supported by implementing policies and incentives that encourage the development of renewable energy projects and the adoption of energy-efficient technologies.

Finally, developing a comprehensive energy policy that outlines clear goals and strategies for improving electricity generation, transmission, and distribution can guide decision-making and ensure long-term sustainability and economic development. This is a really important factor that can help achieve my dream Imo State by 2040. This can involve engaging stakeholders, conducting feasibility studies, and monitoring progress towards achieving targets.

All things being equal, I see a 2040 Imo State where power issues no longer exist. This is the Imo State where small businesses and manufacturing can thrive because electricity is constant, and nobody worries about loss of perishable goods due to poor storage. Like Martin Luther King Jr., I heartily relish that Imo State with joy. This is the Imo State I want to point to my children saying, "We climbed our mountains and forded our streams, we followed our rainbow, and it made our dreams real!"

Some practical ways of investing in these renewable sources can be the state government buying equities or bonds of electricity or utility companies supplying energy or of the companies making components for equipment that are needed to generate power.



About the Author

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Food Security And My Dream Imo State By 2040[1]

By Mercy Agumage Edili

Food is a necessity of life and comes first as a priority before shelter, clothing, or education. Hence adequate food intake, in terms of quantity and quality, is vital for a healthy and productive life. Achieving sustainable economic development will continue to be a delusion without well-nourished and healthy indigenes. Food-secure people constitute a fountain of potential that can transform a nation. However, this will not occur if nutritional deficiencies compromise their health.

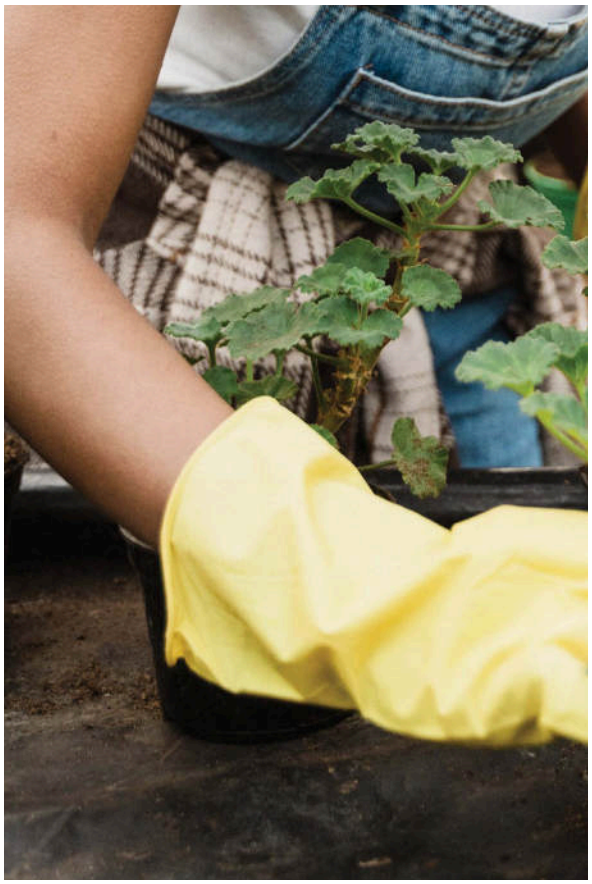
According to the National Population Commission (NPC), Imo State had a population of almost 4,000,000 in 2006 and this population is projected to surpass 7,000,000 by 2040. The inhabitants of Imo State are mainly farmers, traders, civil servants, and artisans. The farmers cultivate crops, rear livestock, or practice mixed farming. The major food crops produced are yam, cassava, and coco-yams. Others are palm-produce including kernels, oil, raffia, and maize. These farmers are overwhelmingly subsistence/smallholders who produce mainly for home consumption or for sale in local markets.

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as people always having reliable access to sufficient and affordable quantities of nutritious food. The achievement of food security is essential for any country, society, or group of people. My dream is that all residents of my State shall enjoy food security by 2040.

Over the years, past governments at the federal level have made successive efforts to boost food production and economic empowerment through the formulation of several policies such as: the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2004), Agriculture Transformation Policy (ATA, 2011), Nigerian Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP, 2016), amongst others. These policies were aimed at improving livelihoods and ensuring food security through community-based agriculture and rural development.

[1]This article won one of the ten 2nd Runners-Up positions in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here has some minor editorial corrections.





In Imo State, the Imo State Agricultural Development Programme (IMO ADP) and Imo State Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP), for example, have over time been undertaken by the government. Laudable though these policies looked on paper, unfortunately the expected outcome of increasing food production or attaining food security was not achieved in full probably because of the lack of dedication and cohesiveness in the implementation of policies by successive governments and relevant stakeholders.

Clearly, with a burgeoning population, it behoves the State government to be more proactive in both formulation of policies and crucially implementation of same. My hope is that by overcoming the impediments in the past programmes, Imo State will achieve food security by 2040. To achieve this dream, we must strive to overcome some impediments.

In Imo State the main causes of inadequate food production leading to food security challenges include the fact that the agricultural sector has remained underdeveloped. The State mainly has small-scale farmers. Few large-scale farms and plantations exist in the State, but their full value is not yet realized. There is a significant lack of adequate credit facilities for farming and allied industries such as storage, processing, and preservation of food, as well as high cost of fertilizers (and other farm inputs), and insufficient investment in the agricultural sector. There is also corruption and insecurity. Government policy inconsistencies do not help. But want can be done about these challenges?

These identified impediments affect food production, resulting in reduced availability of food in sufficient quantities and round the year. This situation leads to price fluctuation of agricultural products. Suggested improvements to these impediments will reduce if not eliminate the impediments to food security in Imo State by 2040.

First, the government needs to improve the agricultural sector by making policies that support improved agricultural productivity. Farmers can learn through relevant seminars and workshops. Farmers using outdated methods waste far too much time and energy compared to the eventual output. Also, too much time and ink are wasted by our elected and civil servants on misconstrued and imported ideas that cannot be implemented in our locality.

Second, the government in collaboration with critical stakeholders (such as the private sector and international development agencies) needs to develop the agricultural sector by facilitating the transition from



an overwhelmingly subsistence/smallholder farmer system to more sustainable green houses and large-scale plantations. The limitation of small-scale farming is that it leads to rural-urban migration of young people leaving behind ageing farmers who cannot sustain agricultural production in sufficient quantities. This migration contributes to the high rate of youth unemployment in urban areas and increases the level of poverty in the state. While far more expensive to set-up, large-scale farming is more efficient and has a wider scope for increased productivity through the application of modern management methods, the use of scientific inputs and the efficient utilization of productive farm resources due to the economies of scale. Large-scale farming ensures the lower cost of handling and marketing of large quantities of agricultural commodities. Moreover, it enables the high participation of youths who through such gainful employment will improve their economic well-being and sense of achievement.

My dream visualises that by 2040 Imo State will have made the jump to adequate food security based on large-scale farming. Of course, small-scale farms shall still exist, but they should be in the minority in terms of the quantity and quality of crops produced. Land in Imo State is at a premium, so it is difficult to get contiguous farmland of 5,000 hectares and above. Government should particularise policies to facilitate the provision of lands for these projects with the handlers anchored on either the farming cooperatives that dot the landscape or private investors with links to such local cooperatives, or farming associations.

Farming experience is an important factor in determining productivity, as a local farmer is more likely to have adequate knowledge of pests, disease management, and weather. This will result in more food crops produced. Hence, it is my dream that the farming associations and cooperatives currently making little impact shall come into their own through these partnerships thereby contributing immensely to food security.

My dream visualises that by 2040 Imo State will have made the jump to adequate food security based on large-scale farming. Of course, small-scale farms shall still exist, but they should be in the minority in terms of the quantity and quality...

Third, increasing farmers' access to credit facilities is a crucial factor in achieving food security. The government, through supportive institutions like the Bank of Agriculture, should provide loans to individual farmers, farmer cooperatives and farming associations so that they can set up large farms for crop cultivation, facilities for livestock husbandry and industries for food processing, preservation, and storage. It is true the government should shun direct involvement in the issuing of loans or running of such enterprises, but my dream will be difficult to fulfil without such indirect government intervention. Furthermore, the best way to do that is not only to launch policies and guidelines but also to grant credit facilities through banks and insurance companies with the government as primary backer.

Fourth, my dream envisions that the cost of fertilizers and other chemical inputs needed to boost production will become more affordable through targeted policies. Yes, some agricultural grants are available but more needs to be done. In addition, the present and successive governments must increase the attractiveness of the State for agricultural investments by issuing tax rebates to both indigenous and non-





indigenous investors coupled with intense investments in infrastructure to support large-scale agriculture (asphalt roads, bridges, silos et cetera).

Fifth, for my dreams to materialise, we must minimise corruption. The past is riddled with connected persons or officials either taking the lands intended for individual farmers in totality or themselves or via surrogates or taking anywhere from 20% or 30% of the principal amount from genuine farmers. There must be honest government monitoring and evaluation by the creditor banks to identify operational challenges and ensure the prompt adherence to the loan terms. Severe sanctions must be the norm for any infracting officials and/or offending banks.

In addition, inconsistent policies by successive governments are another handicap. Governments are supposed to be continuum but alas not in Nigeria where it is common for every new administration to initiate its own policies rather than continue the implementation of its predecessors. I sincerely hope that the support and agricultural policies initiated by this government are continued and improved on by successive administrations. Steady government support includes agricultural extension services like farm mechanisation, technology transfer such as advice on food crop production, livestock production, the education of women and youths, provision of credit facilities healthcare, and a stable market system.

Sixth, insecurity is a major problem facing Imo State currently. Marauding bands of gunmen have made some parts of Imo State unsafe, making the business environment unsafe and unpredictable thereby discouraging investors. I dream that long before 2040 the current government would have nipped this menace in the bud. While not a security expert, I do believe that the current situation is solvable. These criminals are not faceless or unknown in their communities or areas that they operate. If the government can strengthen the police, reinvigorate the vigilantes, and provide bounty-funds to the local political leaders of each of the 305 wards in the State, I do believe that the situation will be eventually stabilised.

Finally, our civil servants are great at writing policy papers but terrible at implementation. No policy can be successful without clear-minded government officials doing their part. I hope that before 2040 our public servants will design better policies that will help to improve food supply whilst alleviating the problems of food security. My dream is that by 2040 policies of successive Imo government would have made commercial farming the engine of the state's economy. That is the best way to enjoy the immense benefits modern agriculture offers in the areas of productivity, economic growth, and development.



About the Author

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THE Coca-Cola COMPANY

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT IN NIGERIA

WORKPLACE

8 OPERATING PLANTS

2,842 JOBS AT THE SYSTEM

KEY DATA

N329B
VALUE ADDED SUPPORTED IN THE ECONOMY ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN

90,500
JOBS CREATED ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN IN 2021

THE COCA-COLA SYSTEM SUPPORTED A TOTAL OF **48,600 JOBS** FOR WOMEN

N136 BILLION
SPENT ON LOCAL SOURCING IN 2021

N29 BILLION
PAID IN SALARIES AND TAXES IN 5YEARS

1 JOB
IN THE COCA-COLA SYSTEM SUPPORTS **31** INDIRECT JOBS

950,000
OUTLETS IN 2021

N78 BILLION
TAX PAYMENT SUPPORTED BY THE SYSTEM IN 5YEARS

0.2%
GDP CONTRIBUTION TO ANNUAL GDP

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

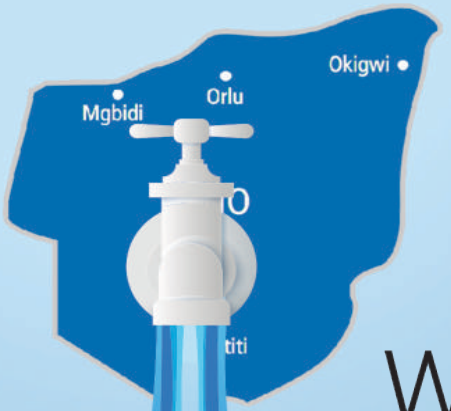
2,300
WOMEN EMPOWERED

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

OVER 5,700 YOUTHS IMPACTED

N928MILLION SPENT ONCOMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS IN 2021





Water Supply in My Dream Imo of 2040[1]

By Favour Obianuju Agwuna

Imo State, proudly known as the "Eastern Heartland," has long been known as the State with the highest literacy level in Nigeria since 1991 and regarded as one of Nigeria's most promising states. However, with all her endowments there are still significant challenges to surmount, especially when it concerns good water supply. I often ask myself how long it will take gifted Imolites to address these challenges, as the end does not seem in sight.

Despite this feeling of pessimism, I have a dream that by the year 2040, Imo State will be better in terms of sanitation, improved health, and water supply. Thus, the main crux of this essay is to first evaluate the barriers to the development of Imo State, particularly in the supply of good water for her residents, which has been a huge problem in many of the rural communities and cities in the State. Beyond reflecting on the barriers, I will offer pragmatic solutions to make Imo a state with full access to good and adequate water supply.

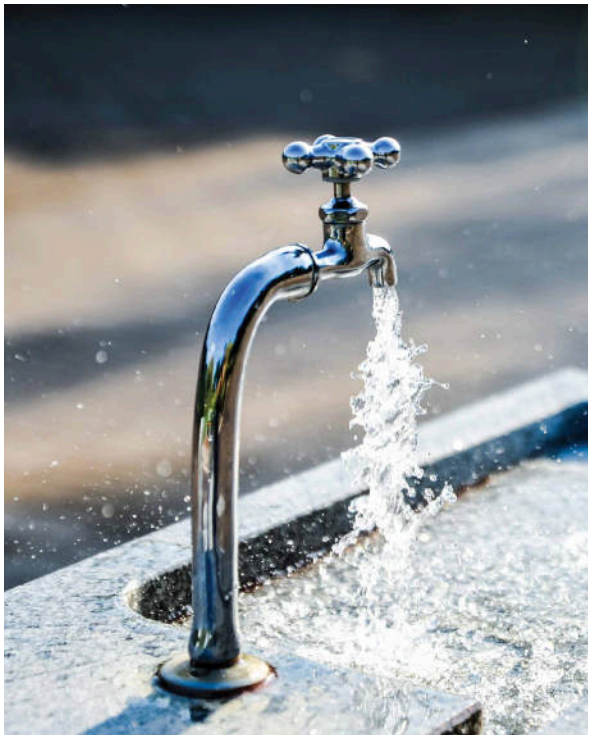
Challenges Facing Imo State Water Supply

Water is a crucial natural resource for the health and functioning of ecosystems as well as for human and animal consumption. It is essential for the growth of plants that support life on earth. Other uses of water include sanitation, recreation and the generation of electricity. If used wisely, water may be a blessing of immeasurable worth to our society. Water, however, might be a curse and bring about ruin and sorrow if it is not properly handled. Without proper management of water quality, the utility of water resources could be jeopardised due to contamination.

Imo State has long been facing myriad of water supply challenges. Even though they have tons of water in their rivers, many places in Imo do not have access to clean water supplies. It is shocking to know that in rural areas of Imo State, 70% of households lack access to improved water supply. Their sources of water include unprotected wells, rivers, perennial streams and sundry water bodies as their only source of water. During the dry season, when the

[1] *This article won one of the ten 2nd Runners-Up positions in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here is an outcome of significant editorial amendments.*





People who live in rural areas, urban slums, disaster-prone locations, and low-income areas and states are the most vulnerable and affected.

wells dry up, community members travel far from their homes to find water in muddy streams.

In Isieke community of Oru East Local Government Area, for instance, the stream which was formerly the community's primary source of water has been contaminated by unchecked socioeconomic activities like improper factory waste disposal in water bodies. As a result of these challenges, the community experiences increase in cases of bad skin conditions, cholera, typhoid fever, stomach distress, and other illnesses linked to contaminated water.

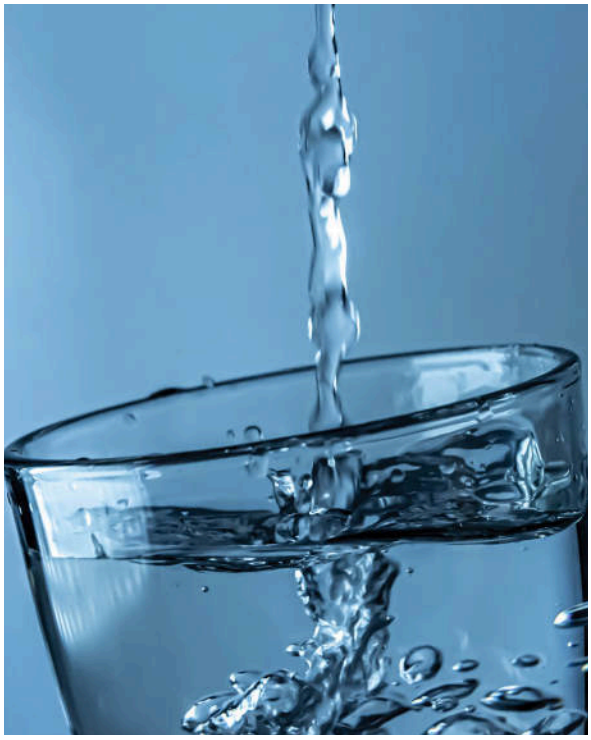
My Imo Dream by 2040: Towards Better Water Supply

To prevent exposure to a wide range of diseases, one must have access to clean potable water and sanitary facilities. Inadequate water supply, sanitation, and hygiene contribute to millions of deaths each year from diseases. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and clean environment. Children are not only able to thrive but also get off to a healthier start in life when they have access to clean water, basic toilets, and excellent hygiene habits.

People who live in rural areas, urban slums, disaster-prone locations, and low-income areas and states are the most vulnerable and affected. Consequently, to mitigate the challenges of water supply in Imo State and meet my dream of 2040 for water supply, there is need for change and government support. For example, since so many people lack the expertise and knowledge necessary to effectively exploit and manage resources like water, the government of Imo State can launch an advocacy and enlightenment campaign to better educate its citizens about water supply and management.

In 2020, the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimated that there would be a global water shortage for developing countries. However, it is good to know that rainwater gathering offers novel means of solving the problem of water. To use non-potable water later, rainwater harvesting involves collecting, diverting, and storing it. Irrigation, human life, and wildlife all have demands that active water harvesting meets. Gardening and landscaping—green life—are more passive.

It is not only about having access to safe drinking water, but efforts should also be directed towards water recycling. Therefore, a paradigm shift to recycling water in Imo State will help with water conservation



and management. Grey water is water that has been left over after bathing, washing clothes and cooking. If maintained free of faeces, filtered grey water is suitable for reuse for non-drinking purposes.

Municipal water supply systems, also, need to be improved. These include all surface structures and systems built or installed for the collection, treatment, storage, transportation, or distribution of drinking water. They also include reservoirs, canals, ditches, pipes, and pipelines. It is also important to have well-thought-out demand and supply management strategy. Demand for water in a city or town can take many different forms, including domestic, public, commercial, and industrial usage. Water is needed by the general public for daily use in homes and for offices, hotels, laundries, restaurants, and manufacturing. The overall amount of water demanded by different populations typically varies greatly. Early mornings and late evenings are often the times of day when residential demand for water is at its highest. Nevertheless, during the workday, water consumption is often constant in commercial and industrial areas. Imo State government's civil and environmental engineers must therefore thoroughly examine each community's and city's water resources in order to construct effective pumping and distribution systems that can meet the needs of the people.

Depending on the quality of the source water that enters the treatment plant, various communities may treat the water in different ways. Most frequently, groundwater or surface water is the type of water that enters the treatment facility. Lakes, rivers, and streams often include more sediment (sand, clay, silt, and other soil particles), bacteria, chemicals, and toxins than groundwater, which means surface water needs more treatment and filtering. As a result, the Imo State government may wish to offer specialised techniques to manage or remove these contaminants for their water to be wholly fit for human consumption.

Finally, the Imo State Water and Sewerage Corporation may consider setting up competent and visionary committee to continuously assess current policies and make improvements including developing the Imo River water basin that will aid effective weather prediction and forecasting as well as climate change warnings. To effect this desired transformation in the water supply system, the committee needs to be sensitive to changing stakeholder needs and preferences, as well as environmental conditions and technologies.

All said and done, addressing the challenges of water supply in Imo State requires team efforts. Our forefathers did not mince words when they opined that "Igwe bu ike", meaning, "there is strength in togetherness". Thus, to improve water supply in Imo State, there is a significant need for her government, private organisations, and all the stakeholders to work earnestly together to improve water supply for the health and betterment of the state.



About the Author

Favour Obianuju Agwuna is a pharmacy student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) who is driven by her passion to improve her society through research and innovation. She was honoured with the Most-Intellectual Student Award from the National Association of Dunukofia-Students in 2021, among other noteworthy achievements.

The Miracle on the Orashi River:

Digitalisation and Process Outsourcing Opportunities for Imo State



By Chinedu Nwogu

Empirical evidence shows that digitalisation transforms and diversifies an economy. One of such economic diversification opportunities is process outsourcing – i.e., taking on jobs and tasks that exist outside Imo State and executing them in the State through digital platforms. This sort of opportunity can make Imo State a prospective location for inter-state migrants who work remotely and other high-tax paying residents.

A lot of professionals are keen on moving out of cities like Abuja and Lagos due to high cost of living and hectic traffic. Imo State offers viable alternatives. The spill-over effect of this is a boost to other areas of the local economy even in the short-term period. This can guarantee the State an inflow of over half a billion dollars' worth of foreign exchange yearly because many people will be working locally and earning an average of $3600 annually. Due to mastery and scale of workers engaged in this industry, Imo state can command a much lower discount rate. The net present value of focusing intensely on a series of specific industries and activities is higher than in splitting efforts because it can be easier to leverage.

Imo State is currently making significant investments in digital skills and infrastructure, which are necessary for process outsourcing. As such, I want to argue in this essay that by creating an enabling environment, Imo State stands a chance of positioning itself as a process outsourcing hub focusing on business process or knowledge process outsourcing (BPO/KPO). The focus of process outsourcing companies is to reduce cost by being contracted as a third-party provider. It is like America outsourcing manufacturing to China to reduce cost. However, in this situation, specific business processes are outsourced. Bookkeeping, human resource, call centres and customer service are examples of jobs that can easily be sourced.

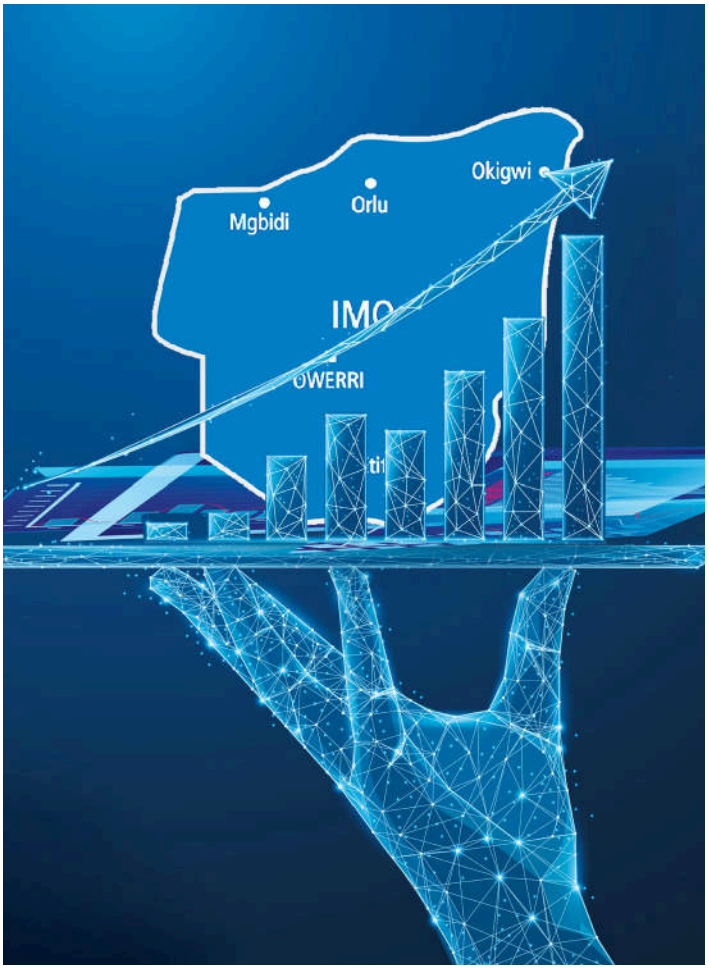
[1] *This article is one of the two 1st Runners-up in the recently concluded essay competition "My Dream Imo State by 2040" organized in May 2023 by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State. What you read here has considerable editorial amendments.*

I have some first-hand experience in this industry, and I believe the potentials are enormous. My family owns an accounting firm which handles audit, consulting and tax for only Nigerian companies and government agencies. However, with the untimely death of my father, the founder of the firm, we lost a lot of clients. To immediately raise back our income, we pivoted into seeking foreign jobs requiring basic accounting skills and non-attestation. I worked in tax while in America so that experience has been important because we have not remained limited to certain types of jobs. My sister runs a tax practice in America, so we work as her partner firm. Thus, she has reduced her labour cost there, while we have increased our income through earning foreign exchange here.

Typically, without specific knowledge, one will be limited to jobs like bookkeeping and basic accounting jobs which actually pay well when converted to Naira. Hence, BPOs are easier to get into and scale faster but KPOs guarantee there is no ceiling on the earnings of third-party providers situated in Imo state.

Tax accounting, for example, is a type of KPO. It is tricky because it requires not just knowing tax laws but knowledge specific to states within the country. However, I must not downplay my blessings. We initially tried to source jobs ourselves online but soon realised there were too many obstacles that made the process slow and tedious like: (a) building online profile for the Company, which takes at least a year and a half to gain traction (b) requirement of access to an American bank account for payment of services (c) accounting and tax involve dealing with sensitive financial information and living in Nigeria can be a location handicap due to negative stereotypes. In summary, this is a problem of trust.

It is obvious that there are certain criteria to be met for this dream of Imo State as a process outsourcing hub to become possible. First, it is important to have a well-equipped and skilled populace. I believe the current Governor of Imo State, His Excellency Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodinma, and his team understand this very well. The SkillUpImo programme rolled out by his administration attests to this.



The second area of priority is accessible internet broadband and road infrastructure within the state. It is important for the government to consider waiving 'right of way' fees to allow telecom companies (Telcos) and internet service providers (ISP) to lay fibreoptic cables for free. I understand right of way fees might help increase the state's internally generated revenue in the short run. However, waiving fees is an incentive for companies to setup infrastructure quick within the state, which makes for good and fast broadband penetration. It is important to note that for any type of digitalisation policy to create consistent and sustainable results, fast and reliable internet is imperative. A consistent speed as high as 1gbps throughout the state will be a real game-changer along with basic road infrastructure.

Third, the government can leverage its buying power and influence to stimulate the digital economy. For instance, the Imo State government may choose to procure services from trainees of its 'SKILL-UP PROGRAMME'. Utilising their skills, they can aim to digitalise all civil service and government processes, thereby eliminating red tapes, making them fast and transparent. The government can also organise a "DIGITAL FAIR" for all tax paying and compliant SMEs. Still employing the skills of its trainees, the government can offer a one-time free digital consultancy service to those who pay taxes.



The world has evolved and merged with the online world. A basic but comprehensive consultancy will focus on helping businesses in Imo become more successful by going digital. They will then follow the trends, improve their business operations and be able to reach a wider customer base both within the country and beyond. In addition, it is important for the government to appropriately allocate funds to strategically orchestrate BPO/KPO industries that are easy to get into and scale up. At the end of the current Skill-UpImo Programme, for instance, a lot of the new trainees will need to be engaged with jobs. A process outsourcing hub solves this problem in the short term and immediately because what is required is a large workforce with basic digital skills.

Fourth, trust is very important in society. The government can also contribute to restoring trust in business transactions by registering, scrutinising, and certifying local companies before pairing them with foreign companies in need of their services. Using events like the Annual Digital Fair earlier mentioned, the government can reach out to foreign companies as well as those living outside the country. A lot of Imo state indigenes, home and abroad, seem to be engaged more in white collar/office work with some owning their own companies. Remittances are nice, however, those living and working abroad will boast of more impact by outsourcing their business process to Imo state. This increases the income of those at home.

Finally, the government may wish to consider establishing a digital free commerce zone. A central BPO/KPO city that doubles as a digital free zone will complement the proposed Orashi Free trade zone, for instance. It will also serve as a regulatory and tech hub for startups and businesses offering digital services. Partnership with organisations like the Charter Cities Institute is very feasible as they are looking to establish in more developing countries. State ambitions become limitless because now, we can carter to not just inter-state migrants from within Nigeria but digital nomads from all over the world looking to settle while engaging in remote work. Companies and residents will benefit from the laws and gas deposits of the Orashi free trade zones. The South Koreans call their economic transformation, the Miracle on the Han River. By 2040, ours will be called The Miracle on the Orashi River.



About the Author

Chinedu Nwogu is an accountant by profession and a partner at Charles Nwogu and Co. He has a passion for development of Imo State and is currently the Proprietor of Stable Genius Academy, Owerri. A native of Emii in Owerri North, he is also a Director at the Woodpeckers Hotel, Lagos. He can be reached via c.amadiugonwogu@gmail.com

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

An interview with Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, Chief Economic Adviser, Imo State Government, on some of the activities of his office, the state of the economy of Imo State, and the prevailing economic condition in Nigeria[1].

What would you describe as the biggest economic challenge faced by the Imo state government?

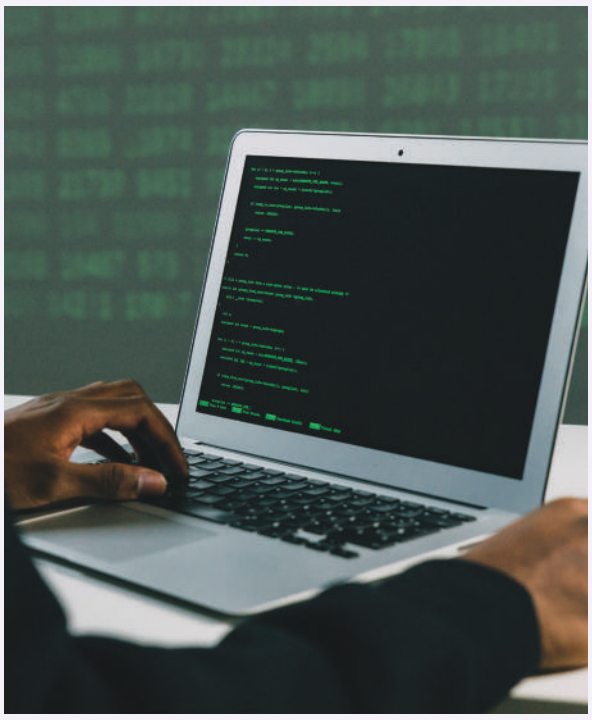
Imo State is blessed with a lot of talents and human capital. As such, the State is amongst the top producers of graduates in the country. Unfortunately, many of these graduates are unemployed because Imo State is not able to absorb all the talents it produces. In addition, there are very few reasonably sized businesses in Imo State, and sometimes the skills available do not match the needs of the market. These issues collectively exacerbate socio-economic tensions. So, I will argue that unemployment is a very big challenge in the State, which can easily breed other societal ills and vices.

How can this challenge be addressed? Are there specific steps taken to address this challenge?

At the start of his governorship, His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodinma, CON – the Executive Governor of Imo State – set an ambitious goal of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Recovery of Imo State. This strategy, which has been dubbed the 3R agenda, recognises the need to address unemployment in the State, as a rehabilitation issue. Hence the significant focus on youth economic empowerment exemplified in the Governor's determination and commitment to train 300,000 Imo youths on digital skills for the global digital economy over a 3-year period starting from January 2023. This is the SkillupImo programme. The idea, which might be the largest initiative of this sort in Africa, is to enable our youths to participate in the global digital economy gainfully and productively from Imo State. This could be in the form of self-employment or other empowering forms of employment.

So, imagine a situation where these youths work from Imo State to support businesses around the world in such areas as web maintenance, database management, process outsourcing, et cetera. These are possibilities that can easily be realised from Imo State. In such instances, some of these youth can earn more than the minimum wage and in hard currencies through self-employment. The number is also significant to position Imo State as the digital skill hub of Africa. This, in itself, is part of the Global Imo Agenda (GIA), which the Governor is passionate to achieve.

Moreover, with the target to train and engage 300,000 youths, even if the multiplier effect is as low as 4 extra persons positively affected per candidate (i.e., a couple with two children), which is actually a worst-case scenario, the programme stands a chance of positively impacting at least 1.2m Imo citizens economically. The anticipated spill-over effects to other sectors and initiatives are immeasurable.



[1] *This interview was first published by Punch Newspapers on September 19, 2023*

In the SkillupImo programme Cohort 1, the government has trained and equipped 5,000 Imo youths with Industry 4.0 tech skills and startup kits to enable them ply trade anywhere in the world while another set of 15,000 Youths are currently being trained in basic, intermediate, and advanced digital skills in the ongoing SkillupImo programme cohort 2.

Apart from digital programme, what other efforts are made to address the challenges of unemployment in Imo State?

Recently, too, and in line with the intention to curb unemployment and empower people economically, the Imo State government is encouraging every kindred/extended family in the State to consider creating a business. This is known as the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI). OKOBI is an ideology that fosters economic partnership and enhanced wealth growth among kindreds. Recognizing the importance of kinship ties in economic development, and beyond the acronym, OKOBI can also be seen an amalgam of two Igbo words Oke, meaning great or real, and obi, place of living or a family. OKOBI provides a platform where individuals from the same family or lineage can collaborate and support each other in their entrepreneurial endeavors. By leveraging the power of shared values, trust, and ancestral connections, OKOBI encourages kindreds to pool resources, share knowledge, and create opportunities for economic advancement. Through strategic partnerships, mentorship programs, and access to capital, OKOBI empowers kindreds to build sustainable businesses, generate wealth, and strengthen the economic fabric of their communities. This approach, which is in line with the original social structure of the Igbo people through the "Umunna" and "Umuada", has a significant potential of addressing the issues of unemployment and poverty from the grass root level upwards.

The government has also invested heavily in market opening and job creating hard infrastructure. The massive road networks are already supporting businesses and creating jobs. In addition, the dredging of ORASHI river to the Atlantic Ocean, which was launched by the Governor in May this year and is already receiving international attention, will further open up Imo State to the world, attract significant investments, and create many jobs.

The One Kindred One Business Initiative sounds interesting, but what is unique about it?

OKOBI can operate in many ways. Kindreds can choose to own a business outright. Opportunities for co-investment mean people can also decide to invest in an already existing business owned by members of their kindred. That way, the kindred members become shareholders whilst leveraging and respecting the individual agency of entrepreneurship. Beyond filial relationships, OKOBI can also function in support networks of groups of people such as friends, members of social clubs, and co-workers. What matters most here is the ability to collaborate in the pursuit of a desirable collective goal effectively and efficiently,



whilst leaving no one behind. In short, this version of OKOBI is founded on the principle of nwanne di na mba (meaning that brotherhood or sisterhood is not defined by filial relationships but by shared interests, values, and worldviews). OKOBI is already generating significant interest amongst local people with kindreds starting businesses in farming, services, and manufacturing. Some of these emerging kindred businesses target local markets, but others seek to explore opportunities in foreign markets through Nigeria's diaspora community. In addition to its potential to transform lives in local communities, OKOBI offers the government an opportunity to formalise grassroots business ventures, grow the economy, and expand its revenue generation capability. These benefits are currently missed opportunities, which OKOBI can help reverse.

The exchange rate and fuel subsidy removal policies of the Federal Government have led to increased hardship and poverty for many Nigerians. How can state governments ameliorate the impact of these policies? Also, what is the Imo State government doing to ensure that the people of Imo get some form of relief from the negative impacts?

Subsidies are useful policy instruments meant to address specific shortcomings – especially welfare issues – in societies. They are hardly permanent solutions. When they are not properly calibrated and implemented, subsidies can distort the market, get into wrong places, and impact negatively on the capacity of the government to holistically assist those they are meant to help. Based on this perspective, one can argue that the former fuel subsidy in Nigeria fell short of its holistic social welfare aspirations, as it had leakages, created undesirable opportunities, and significantly overburdened the country financially to the point that it affected the capacity of the government to provide essential services for collective social welfare. Moreover, it seems to hurt the saving capacity of the country and investments in critical areas like education, health, and infrastructure. Although it is obvious that the removal comes with its own pains and hardships, I see it as a necessary short-term pain for a much better tomorrow.

The Federal Government and the Imo State Government, respectively, have publicised some ideas on how to cushion the short-term negative impacts. The next thing is to implement these ideas and see the work in practice. For instance, Imo State recently made upward adjustments to the salaries of some civil servants. The government has also provided transportation support to the people, as well as free medical care for civil servants amongst other things.



However, implementation is not always a straightforward journey. It involves some experimentation and social learning. As the government tries to implement these ideas, there will be occasional need to shift and make necessary changes based on lessons learnt from the implementation process. Given that it is a new terrain for the government and the people, everyone should also be patient with the process with the knowledge that positive changes, like childbirth, oftentimes come with a lot of pains.

Do you have any specific advice for the Federal Government in this regard?

Given that this is a socio-economic experiment, in the sense that the impacts are still unfolding, it helps not to be overly rigid with policies and approaches. I can see that the Federal government is already flexible. This should not be seen as a mistake or unnecessary policy somersaults, because there are a lot to learn as the process unfolds. Once the policies and approaches are people oriented, we shall all be fine in the end. Nonetheless, there is a role for opposition politicians and social critics to keep the government on its toes. That's one of the beauties of democracy. It is hardly a harmonised choir, but one entrenched in contestations and struggles. These continuous contestations and struggles partly inform the innovativeness of democracy. It is rather strange to perceive them as anomalies or unwanted. To accept democracy is to



willingly embrace its inherent struggles and antagonisms. True democrats and politicians understand this, and happily live with it.

One major problem in the country is low revenue generation. In what ways can governments at all levels boost revenues without significant negative impact on the masses?

I am a firm believer in entrepreneurship. I do not subscribe to the view that entrepreneurship is limited to non-State actors. The government can be entrepreneurial. This is at the heart of the Entrepreneurial State Movement currently promoted by some scholars and politicians. States can generate revenues through business-like activities. Taxations and levies are not the only sources of government revenues. Some countries with significant natural resources do not tax and levy their people heavily. If the government could focus more on how it can be more entrepreneurial through investments and other business-like activities, it will enhance government revenues and reduce the emphases on taxes and levies.

Another approach is to reduce leakages, increase the tax net, and enhance efficiency and trust through accountability. This point on accountability is actually a very important one. In a recent study I conducted on tax and citizens perceptions in Nigeria, we found that Nigerians are not necessarily unwilling to pay taxes. However, they are weary to pay into the proverbial black boxes and dark holes without seeing the benefits of their taxes. So, one quick way to enhance voluntary compliance is to clearly show people how their taxes are spent. This should not be a tall order for any government that truly believes in accountability.

It is instructive to note that the Imo State government has made significant improvements in the area of financial accountability since the governorship of His Excellency Senator Hope Uzodinma. These improvements have been recognised by local and international organizations. Only recently, the State received over 12 million dollars from World Bank for transparency and management of the State's resources.

A number of businesses have had to be resilient to survive in the country, with many of them describing the business environment as unfriendly or very challenging. In what ways can governments at all levels create an enabling environment for businesses, especially MSMEs? How is the Imo State government ensuring that businesses in Imo thrive, especially with the threat of the sit-at-home that has negatively affected many businesses?

Enabling business environment has become a cliché and is over flogged. In my opinion, the issues are rather straightforward – i.e., the government in collaboration with non-State actors needs to provide hard infrastructure (e.g., roads and telecommunication enablers) and soft infrastructure (e.g., rule of law, quality education, fair taxes, et cetera). Often, the pursuit of enabling business environment is neglected because of perverse incentives and misaligned interests. It only takes political will and a good leader to drive this agenda. It is not a rocket science. In Imo State, for example, the Governor has prioritised the construction of rural and urban roads in the State – including major roads like Owerri-Orlu and Owerri-Okigwe roads which have been completed, and the Owerri-Mbaise-Umuahia road, which is nearing completion. These roads have eased the challenges of transportation, increased property value, and created new economic opportunities, amongst others.

The Governor has also prioritised digitalisation of the State and created the first Ministry of Digital Economy and E-Government in Nigeria. The Imo Digital Economy Agenda (IDEA) 2022-2026, is anchored on six strategic pillars: Digital Literacy and Skill, Solid Infrastructure, Service Infrastructure, Advocacy, Monitoring and Evaluation, Collaboration and Partnership. One of the mandates of this ministry is to provide robust telecommunication infrastructure in the State to support the Global Imo Agenda as the digital hub of Africa. The government has also created the "connected IMO Initiative" being driven as a PPP with the Heartland FibreOptics Nig. Ltd to facilitate the provision of broadband Fibre optics infrastructure across the 27 LGAs with Point of internet Access (PoIA) at public institutions like schools, Markets, LGA head offices, churches, hospitals and Community Centres as well as business districts in the state. The aim is to boost the drive towards achieving a smart and inclusive economy in the State.

Businesses sometimes complain of multiple taxes and levies. To avoid such confusions and complaints, the Governor has recently banned anybody apart from the Imo State Inland Revenues Services from collecting taxes and levies from anyone. There are also constant legal and policy reforms to attract and retain investors. Recently, too, the Governor announced N5 billion revolving loan for framers, and a good number of them are MSMEs.

How would you describe your role as the chief economic adviser to the Imo State government?

I thank His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Governor of Imo State for appointing me his and the Imo State government's Chief Economic Adviser. He has made the role easy for me by allowing me to combine it with my full-time academic appointments at the University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, where I hold a chair in sustainable business and development, and the European University Institute, Italy where I hold a chair in sustainable finance and governance, respectively. I also hold visiting professor positions at the London School of Economics, United Kingdom, and the University of Cape Town, South Africa. In addition, I am a member of the European Commission High Level Expert Group on sustainable finance in low- and medium-income countries. These roles make it easy for me to do the Chief Economic Adviser job pro bono.

Working with Senator Hope Uzodimma is also easy. He is an ideas-person and believes strongly in the view that ideas govern the world. As such, he has remained open to progressive ideas and provided the necessary resources and support for me to operate effectively. There are a lot of positive things happening in Imo State, but one needs to be close to appreciate them. Most importantly, the Governor has been the champion and pioneer of these ideas and initiatives. My role is mainly to help translate those within my remit into practice. In addition, the role has given me a rare privilege to practicalise some of the theories I have developed in the academia. Since the academia is still my primary constituency and community of practice, this combination of theory and practice, I guess, will make me a much better academic. For this, I am sincerely grateful to His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma, for giving me this rare opportunity to serve Ndi Imo as a Chief Economic Adviser.



My vision for Imo State aligns with the Governor's 3R Agenda and the Global Imo Agenda. That is one of the reasons I accepted to work for and with him. Hopefully, one day, Imo State will have full employment, and become self-sufficient and a major player in the world.

In addition to your role, what is your vision for Imo State?

My vision for Imo State aligns with the Governor's 3R Agenda and the Global Imo Agenda. That is one of the reasons I accepted to work for and with him. Hopefully, one day, Imo State will have full employment, and become self-sufficient and a major player in the world. This vision is strongly behind the industrialization policy of Imo State, which was launched in November 2022, the Imo Development Plan, which will be launched soon, and the ongoing implementation of SkillUPImo digital programme, the massive development of road networks in the State, the dredging of ORASHI river, and the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI) to mention but a few. However, occupying a position, for me, is not sufficient. What matters most is what one uses the position to do. Since January 2022 I started this role, my eyes have been on how to make the Imo economy work for Ndi Imo and create enduring practices and institutions that would constitute a legacy. This is my aspiration and I pray for the wisdom and capacity to realise it. So far, we are on course but as they say, time shall tell! And for now, we keep moving!



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:

UPDATES ON SOME KEY ACTIVITIES OF THE **OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER**

1. One Kindred, One Business Initiative (OKOBI)

In line with the 3R agenda of the Executive Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government launched the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI), an initiative aimed at rural economic empowerment through job and wealth creation. OKOBI is simply group-owned businesses founded on the natural social structure of the 'umunna' in Igboland where businesses are owned and managed by the kindred, based on its relative strengths and comparative advantage. It depicts a synergy of ideas, strengths, expertise, and resources brought together to create a lucrative and sustainable joint business. For a business to be recognized and identified as an OKOBI, it must be: (i) duly registered as group-owned or cooperative business, (ii) employment oriented, (iii) profit oriented and (iv) domiciled in Imo State.

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser offers support to interested groups in the broad areas of business registration, training, coaching, mentorship, and other support services.

Since its launch, OKOBI has received recognition and accolades both locally and internationally; London School of Economics, EBS Berlin, Germany, Leiden University, Netherlands, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, and Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia have at different times and interactions explored the potentials of OKOBI recognising its capacity for poverty eradication and grassroot empowerment in Africa.

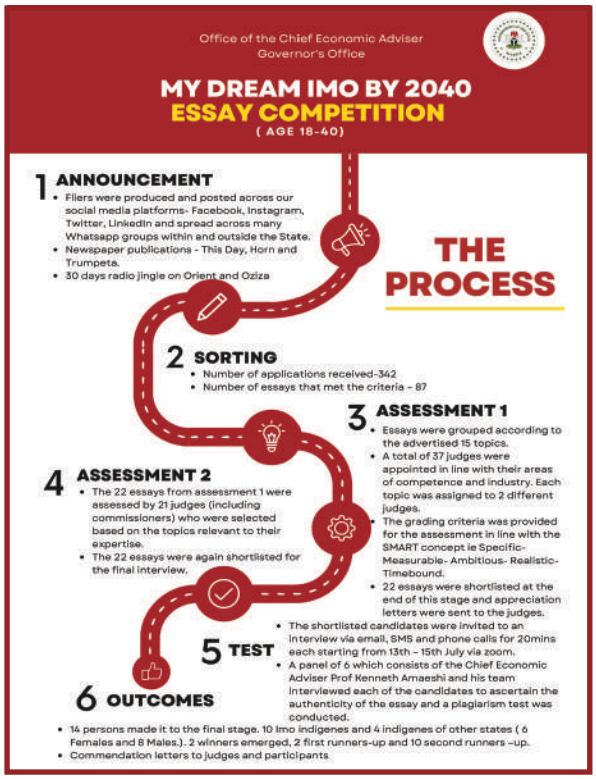
2. THE IMO ECONOMY STUDY (TIES) WEBINARS

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser has continued to offer fortnightly TIES webinars on business opportunities in Imo State and beyond. Directed at investors, entrepreneurs and the general population, the webinar series which began in 2022 are intended to stimulate economic activities by exploring and explaining the economic opportunities in different sectors of the economy. With over ten million listening audience across platforms globally, the TIES webinar series have inspired, motivated, and enlightened our teeming audience with lucrative business opportunities they can venture into. To watch a replay of any of these webinars visit our YouTube page and follow the Chief Economic Adviser on his social platforms for more updates from his office. Facebook: https://web.facebook.com/ChiefEconomicAdviserIMSG Twitter: https://twitter.com/ceaimsg LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/chief-economic-adviser-imsg/ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@chiefeconomicadviserimsg Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/chiefeconomicadviser_imsg/



3. MY DREAM IMO ESSAY COMPETITION

In May 2023, the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government organised an essay competition dubbed "My Dream Imo 2040" for young people between ages 18 and 40 to envision the Imo State of their dream by 2040. The aim of the essay competition was to engage young minds to the Imo State of their dreams through essay writing. It was very successful.





"...the purpose of this competition is to engage the imagination of our youths on critical issues of governance... This is the essence of inclusive governance at the heart of the 3R agenda of my administration."

Commenting on the exercise, the Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodimma, said: "the purpose of this competition is to engage the imagination of our youths on critical issues of governance and capture their voices in the soon to be launched Imo Development Plan (2023-2033). This is the essence of inclusive governance at the heart of the 3R agenda of my administration. I congratulate the winners". Also reacting to the outcome of the essay competition, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, said: "it was a very stiff competition of ideas. I am impressed by the quality of the essays, and more impressed that young people from other states competed and won. Watching and listening to the candidates defend their essays further convinces me that the future is bright, especially if our talents are properly identified, nurtured, and channelled to greatness. I thank the judges who did an amazing work and congratulate the winners".





Chisom Marvelous Sunday | The Lady Behind Fichaa Solutions and Cleaning Services

Fichaa is an Igbo word, which literally means "clean-up". It is a clarion call to keep our environment clean and healthy, which has been transformed into a growing business by Ms Marvelous Chisom Sunday. She has always been interested in business following the experience of assisting her mother run a restaurant business at the young age of 6.

Born in 1996 in Okpualangwa, Isialangwa North LGA of Abia State to the family of Mr. Samuel and Mrs. Gift Sunday, Chisom had her primary and secondary education at International Organization of Good Templars (I.O.G.T) Owerri and Girls Secondary School, Akwakuma, Owerri North, respectively. Afterwards she gained admission into Hezekiah University where she studied Pure and Industrial Chemistry and graduated with an upper second degree.

Chisom believes that a clean and healthy environment enhances productivity and sustainable development. Hence, her business mission is to render all kinds of professional cleaning services and help create cleaner and safer environments. From a humble beginning, Chisom started the cleaning business first as a means of survival. She also had a desire to help busy individuals and families keep their homes and offices clean and healthy. She saw a need in the community

where she lived for reliable and affordable cleaning services and decided to make a business out of it.

Today, Chisom has built Fichaa Solutions and Services into a firebrand professional cleaning company that delivers quality cleaning services to a retinue of broad-based clientele. Currently, the company employs about fourteen full-time workers excluding those on contract or special arrangement. The business serves homeowners, businesses, organisations, estate agents, construction companies, events planners, facility managers, malls, property managers, hotels, events centre, government agencies and parastatals.

FICHAA offers surface and deep-cleaning services, move-in and move-out cleaning, before and after-event cleaning, post-construction cleaning and others. FICHAA's vision is to develop and deploy innovative technologies and techniques that improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance customer experience. It is also environmentally conscious and prioritises green and eco-friendly cleaning products.

FICHAA is a profitable business with growing operations and customer-base. The company receives a lot of positive feedback from clients and interested stakeholders, which is an expression of satisfaction and trust. FICHAA dreams of expansion and consolidation. As the company grows, it intends to reinvest some of its profits into critical areas such as marketing, personnel capacity building, and the purchase of new equipment. Indeed, the company is looking at the future with confidence.

Beyond its focus on profitability, Fichaa is also society and job creation conscious. According to, Chisom, the Managing Director, the company has an eye on high-quality and eco-friendly cleaning services for creating more job opportunities for the youths. The basic principles that guide their operations include prowess, honesty, integrity, excellence, consistency, and transparency in all operations. Fichaa is committed to delivering exceptional services, treating its employees and clients with respect and fairness, and going above and beyond by all means possible to exceed their expectations. In short, the company is committed to sustainability in the true sense of sustainable development, and works to create a cleaner, healthier world.

However, the business has its fair share of challenges. One of these challenges is building a loyal client-base in a competitive market. The strategy for overcoming it includes focusing on building strong relationships with old and new clients, providing exceptional services, and leveraging word-of-mouth referrals, encouraging referrals from friends and colleagues to grow the business. Another option is investing in marketing and advertising to increase visibility in the local community. And it is paying off.

There is also the challenge of unavailability and high cost of machinery. It is unimaginable the cost of basic cleaning equipment due to high exchange rate to the dollar. Movement of personnel and machinery is another major challenge due to the unreliability of public transport operators. This leads to a lot of delays in service delivery or cancellations, which is not good for the business. The company is making efforts to buy their own vehicles or enter into some lease agreements to overcome this challenge.

For those who wish to begin new businesses, there are gaps in related areas that can complement the services being offered by this firm. For instance, there are opportunities in areas such as landscaping, home repairs, or interior designing to provide a more comprehensive solution for homeowners and businesses. On what other forms of support they need, Chisom said that the best kind of support can come in the form of patronage, referrals, positive reviews, and word-of-mouth recommendations. Of course, they would greatly appreciate financial support as this would help them get some necessary machines needed for effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of our services. This will also help them provide a wide range of services, increase their customer base, and create more jobs and employment.

Fichaa is open to partnership and collaborations with property managers, landlords, hotel owners and managers, school owners and managers, event planners, construction companies, interior designers, et cetera. That way they can provide comprehensive cleaning solutions.

Chisom's story and efforts can serve as encouragement to other young people who may want to create their own businesses.

For all bookings and more info about us, reach us @ 08100090707. Connect with us through our social media handles. Facebook and TikTok @Fichaa Solutions; Instagram @fichaasolutions. Mail us @ fichaaservices@gmail.com



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The Future is Green, and Green is now!

The fascinating story of **Gift Muoneke** and His Co-founded Renewable Energy Company



Gift Muoneke, the co-founder and CEO of Green-Era Technologies, is highly passionate about renewable energy, rural electrification, community engagement and technology. He enjoys innovating to enhance and create solutions for simple and complex real-world problems. This is the exact mind-set behind Green-Era Technologies, which has a mission of providing cheap and renewable energy across Imo State and environs.

Gift was born in Lagos on the 24th of March, 1997 to the family of late Mr. Martin Okechukwu and Lois Ebele Muoneke of Akokwa, Ideato LGA of Imo State. He attended Roman Catholic Mission School between 2001-2006 and Royal Comprehensive College from 2007-2014 all in Ayetoro, Ogun State. He subsequently proceeded to study Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the Federal University of Technology (FUTO) between 2016 and 2021 and graduated with second class upper division.

With his problem-solving mindset and in agreement with his friends, Prince Ngwu and Favour Chidiebere, Green-era Technologies Limited was born during the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate stimulus for the setting up of Green-Era Technologies, as he said, was when he met a woman using candle as the source of light in her fruits stall business because she had to sell into the night to feed and care for her family. They decided to build a solar system that can provide her power, giving her the flexibility to pay for power only when she uses it. This solution was a whopping 60% less than what she spent before then on energy.

So, their inspiration stemmed from having witnessed first-hand the challenges faced by poor people living in off-grid areas who lacked access to reliable electricity. Their orientation to the grassroot ensured that they could connect to the rural people and understand their needs. According to him, "we were deeply motivated to make a positive impact in their lives by providing them with cheap electricity while at the same time contributing to a cleaner, greener planet."

But the interest in solving social problems did not just happen. Gift and Prince had background in electrical and electronics engineering. In addition to that, Gift was actively involved with impact-driven organisations such as ENACTUS – a network of



leaders committed to using business as a catalyst for positive social and environmental impact – and Junior Achievement Nigeria, where he led some community projects. These experiences also sharpened their social consciousness and supported their commitment to social impact and sustainable development.

So far, Green-Era Technologies has moved from powering only three businesses in 2020 to using solar grids to serve about 73 micro and small businesses (SMEs) such as barbers, salons, phone charging and repair businesses to mention only a few. They have also met the energy demands of over 100 individuals through their standalone systems and made full installation for 2 big hospitals.

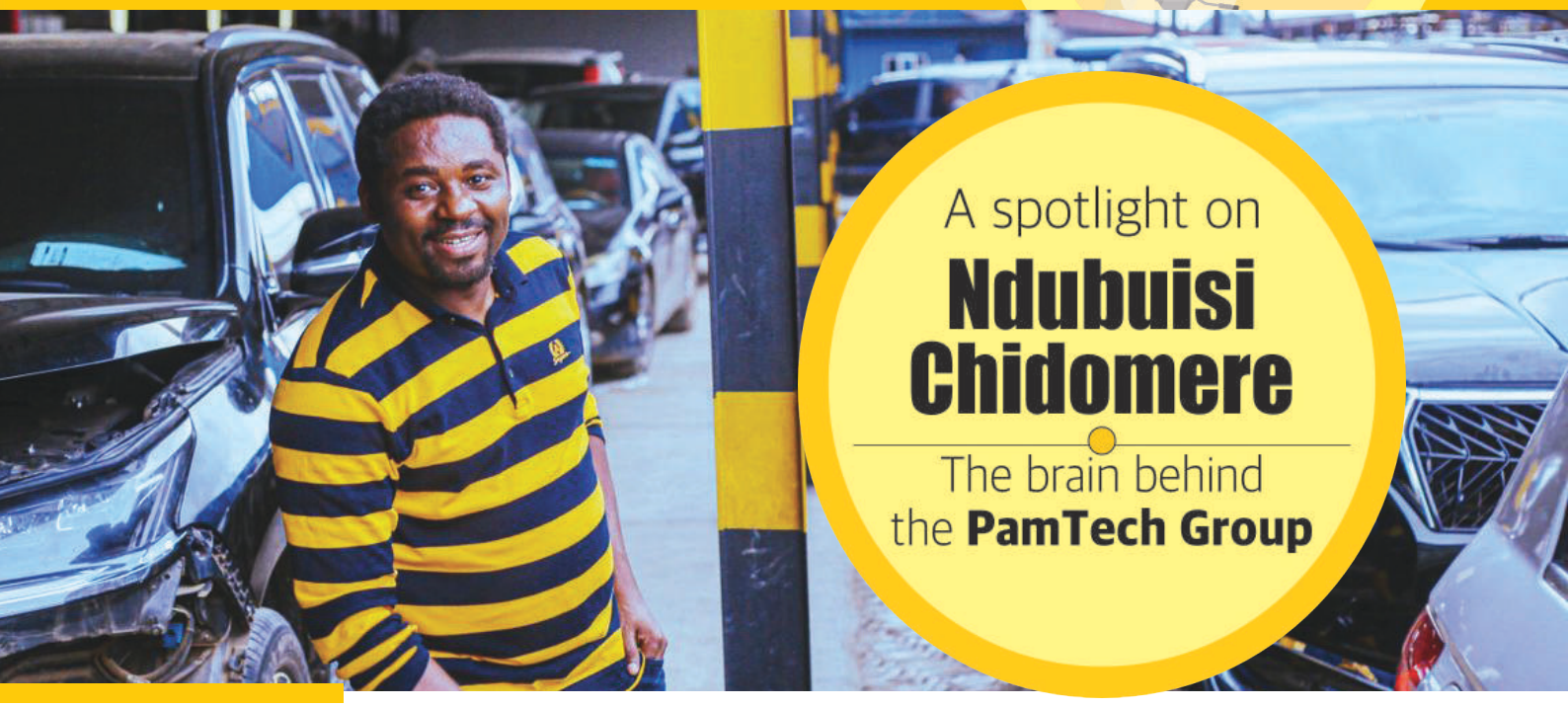
Today, the company has nine staff, and its power-supply business has grown to generate over N11 million naira in just one year. It is a profitable business. Although they aim for social impact, they are also guided by the principles of financial sustainability through the diversification of revenue streams and prudent financial management. He believes that the company's profitability is encouraging and that they anticipate continued growth.

But it is not all roses, though. There are challenges. The major challenge they faced was the problem of funding for the provision of solar grids to meet up with increasing demands. Although there is still room for more funding, they met their immediate needs by reaching out to investors. They also secured grants and formed strategic partnerships with organisations with similar interests. Further and diverse expansion needs would require more investors.

Beyond funding, they also faced stiff resistance from the communities and market associations. Using diplomacy, dialogue, and community engagement strategies they successfully overcame those hostilities and challenges and gained local support when it became clear to the antagonists that they stood to benefit from the new power supply arrangements. They also had to deal with regulatory bottlenecks and complexities in the renewable energy sector, which they successfully navigated through proactive stakeholder engagements.

Greenera Technologies Ltd is hopeful and optimistic about the future. They have the vision to expand clean energy access to even more underserved communities, within Nigeria and eventually across Africa. They are aspiring to become a leading provider of renewable energy solutions, empowering individuals, creating jobs, and contributing to global efforts to combat climate change. While they focus on clean energy access, there are complementary gaps that other entrepreneurs can address, such as improving access to quality healthcare, education, and clean water in rural communities. They believe that collaborative efforts across sectors can create holistic solutions for underserved populations.

To learn more about Green-Era Technologies and their services, please visit https://greeneratech.com/ To contact Gift Muoneke please call on 08165533706, 07033771639, 08133152927 and/or email: gift.neke@gmail.com, greeneratechnologies@gmail.com, gift.muoneke@greeneratech.com



A spotlight on Ndubuisi Chidomere

The brain behind the PamTech Group

Q: Please could you introduce yourself to us?

A: Certainly, I'm Ndubuisi Chidomere, Managing Director of Pamtech Group. I was born in August 1979 in Amatta, Ikeduru, Imo State, into the family of the late Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Chidomere. My educational journey began at Oboama Community Primary School (1986-1991) and progressed to Mbaise Secondary School (1991-1997). Later, I earned my degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, in 2004, graduating with a second-class upper division.

Q: What was your background before establishing Pamtech Group?

A: Prior to founding Pamtech Group, my career was molded by a transformative 10-year service as a Technical Assistant at the Millennium Development Goals Office (Imo MDGs) in Imo State, from 2007 to 2016. Working alongside the devoted Miss Ozioma Megwa, we spearheaded initiatives aligned with the MDGs' global objectives, a role that was both challenging and rewarding. This period wasn't just about administrative tasks; it demanded strategic leadership, critical decision-making, and a deep understanding of project management, skills that later became cornerstones in navigating the multifaceted realms of the oil and gas, and automotive sectors. It was this crucial juncture in my career that not only honed my professional acumen and commitment to service but also inspired the foundational principles upon which Pamtech Group stands today.

Q: What is the inspiration and motive behind the setting up of the Pamtech Group?

A: The inception of Pamtech Group was God's will and we were motivated by a strong desire to offer committed service to humanity. We were inspired by the need to address several pressing issues in our local community, as well as the opportunity to contribute to economic growth and development in our nation. We first started as a team of three, a current Director, our now amazing GM and I. It wasn't an easy ride entirely but we had to put in our hearts, resources and minds in building the Pamtech Group that's being celebrated today.

Q: Please share with us Pamtech Group actually began?

A: Pamtech Group began as a small oil and gas marketing company in 2016 with just two trucks. At first, we didn't have much and had to use what we had very carefully. Then, our friends and some people who wanted to support us gave us money to help us grow, and we were able to get a few more trucks. Over

time, we got bigger in the oil and gas area, and after four years, we started working with auto repair and car parts, too. We wanted to help our customers with all their needs in one place. Now, we have almost 200 people in our team, working in both the Oil and Gas and Automobile areas. We're also planning to bring our work to bigger cities in Nigeria soon.

Q: What societal problems or challenges are you solving?

A: Our multifaceted approach aims to tackle various societal problems, including fuel shortages and disruptions in vehicles. In the oil and gas sector, we saw the recurring issue of fuel shortages at the filling stations and transportation disruptions due to unreliable supply chains and compromised products. Our primary goal is to ensure a consistent and reliable supply of authentic and uncompromised petroleum products to filling stations and businesses, alleviating these disruptions. That led us to solving vehicle maintenance challenges. In the auto repair sector, we identified the struggles of car owners in finding trustworthy and skilled mechanics. We aimed to provide quality auto repair services, ensuring that vehicles are maintained properly, enhancing safety on the roads, and extending the lifespan of vehicles. We are also solving the problem of counterfeit auto spare parts. The auto parts market was also plagued by counterfeit products that posed safety risks to vehicle owners. Our vision there was to establish an auto spare parts center offering only genuine Original Equipment Manufactured products, thus improving road safety and the reliability of vehicles.

Q: What significant achievements have you recorded?

A: Over the years, we have achieved significant milestones, including expanding our fleet of trucks to over 30 to meet the growing demand for petroleum products. We have also established a reputable auto repair garage equipped with state-of-the-art diagnostics and repair equipment located along Avu Portharcourt Road Owerri. In addition, we are building a well-stocked auto spare parts center, which has become a go-to destination for customers seeking genuine OEM products. We are happy to have set up the first of its kind media sector where we have trained and nurtured amazing content creators using education and entertainment to educate people about their cars and even more. We have also been able to render premium and luxury car-hire services to the people of South East Nigeria with our fleet of executive SUVs - Land cruiser Prado and Lexus.

Q: What would you say are the guiding principles of your business?

A: Our operations are guided by a set of core principles, including integrity, customer satisfaction, excellence, ethics and teamwork. That can be seen in our day-to-day operations and the system with which we run our businesses. Another interesting aspect of our business is our dedication to supporting local talent and providing employment and training opportunities within our community. This not only helps address unemployment issues but also strengthens the local economy and fosters a sense of belonging and pride among our team members and customers.

Q: Can you share with us the profitability index of your company?

A: Currently, our business is not only sustainable but also profitable. We continue to experience steady revenue growth and an expanding customer base, reaffirming our commitment to long-term success.





Q: What is your vision for the future?
A: Our vision extends beyond our current achievements. We aspire to become a continental leader in the oil and gas, auto repair, media, transport and auto spare parts sectors. We also have interest in the real estate sector and FCMGs. To achieve this, we plan to expand our services to neighboring states and markets, invest in advanced technologies and training to remain at the forefront of industry innovation and maintain our unwavering dedication to quality and customer satisfaction. We even have a mobile app currently being developed which will serve as the foremost hub for real time petroleum pricing and also enable station owners handle their operations much more effectively.

Q: What other complementary gaps exist in this industry, in case there are people out there who might wish to invest?
A: In addition to our core services, there are several complementary gaps that others can focus on such as Green Energy Solutions, that is, investing in renewable fuels and electric vehicle charging infrastructure which aligns with the global shift toward sustainable transportation. Also, we encourage advancements in vehicle technology, including autonomous driving and connectivity, even electric vehicles and automobiles. The truth is, if we have more businesses focus on serving humanity as much as we do, we would do businesses that will be heard all over the world.

Q: What are the major challenges that confront your businesses today and your plans to overcome them?
A: Our journey has not been without challenges. We've had challenges ranging from stiff market competition, regulatory complexities, some cases of shady team members and supply chain issues. To overcome these challenges, we prioritised delivering exceptional service quality and building a loyal customer base. We went ahead to foster strong relationships with reliable suppliers to ensure a steady and quality supply of petroleum products. We have invested in compliance with industry regulations to maintain a transparent and legally compliant operation and made sure that we have a robust team culture, one that is founded on service, love and integrity.

Q: What other supports does your business need?
A: To realise our vision and overcome future challenges, we would greatly benefit from investment and financing for expansion into new markets and service areas; access to cutting-edge automotive technologies and innovations; collaborations and partnerships with renewable energy providers to explore sustainable energy solutions.

Q: Any Closing Remarks?
A: Pamtech Group's dedication to addressing societal problems and challenges in Nigeria extends beyond our core services in the oil and gas, auto repair, and auto spare parts sectors. We leverage our media sector presence to educate and entertain our audience about preventive maintenance, and we offer executive car hire services to provide premium transportation options. Through these initiatives, we remain committed to enhancing the well-being and quality of life in our community while upholding our core principles of integrity, excellence, team work and ethical standards.

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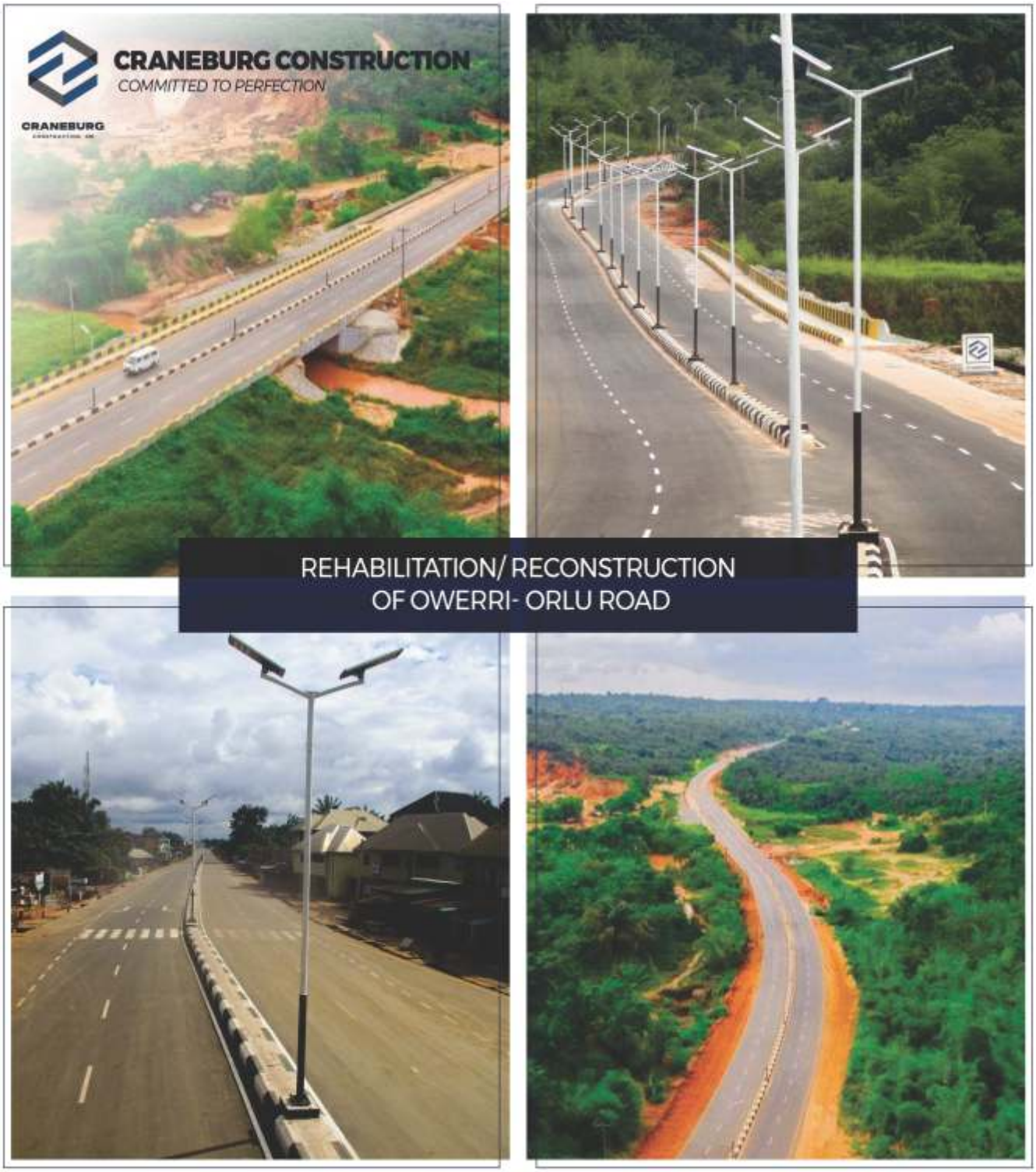

REHABILITATION/ RECONSTRUCTION
OF OWERRI- ORLU ROAD

Craneburg Construction

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$1.36B.
Corporate taxes and royalties paid to the Nigeria Government

220
Beneficiaries of Shell LiveWire entrepreneurship programme.





$79.77M.
Paid to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2022.

$1.9B.
Contracts awarded to Nigerian-registered companies in 2022.





3,500
University grants and 990 cradle- to-career scholarship grants awarded since 2016.

$106.3M.
Disbursed to communities through GMOUs since 2017.





$200M.
Committed to support All On for renewable energy impact investments.

$15M.
Educational infrastructure projects in Lagos and Bayelsa states.





92,000+
People benefited from CHIS (Community Health Insurance Scheme) since 2010

$34.29M.
Direct social investment made by SPDC JV, SNEPCo and SNG in 2022.





$1M.
Donated by Shell for relief to people impacted by the flood disaster in 2022.

Powering Progress in Nigeria

The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited
Operator of the NNPC/SPDC/TotalEnergies/NAOC Joint Venture

NNPC TotalEnergies eni naoc