Small businesses gasp for breath as rising costs threaten margins

Ifeoma Maduka

A
derful day at work, Mrs Grace Osas (not real name), a fashion designer dealing in ready-to-wear outfits in Benin City, Edo State, decided to treat herself to her favour-ite local snack, boli (roasted plantain) and fish. On reaching the boli stall, however, she discovered that prices had nearly doubled from the last time. When she inquired from the seller, Mama Aminat explained that the increase in the prices of her boli and fish was as a result of a general rise in the cost of goods and services. “Everything has gone up”, Mama Aminat said. “The worst is transportation. I hardly make profit these days. I thank God that my capital has not been affected!”

Mrs. Osas could understand Mama Aminat’s lamentation. She too felt the pain as the prices of both machinery and raw materials she used in her fashion busi-ness continued to rise daily as a result of the dwindling value of the local currency, naira, against foreign currencies like the dollar. Poor power supply, logistical and supply issues, inflation, material shortages, among other issues had caused her to miss numerous customer demands. She also faced the dilemma of raising funds for expansion and up-grading her machinery while contending with high interest rates and lack of accessible, affordable loans, even as staff frequently requested salary increases to manage their per-sonal expenses.

But Mrs. Osas and Mama Aminat are not alone in this situation. Many business-es across Nigeria have been struggling to survive amid high operating cost, but their woes have worsened since May 29, 2023 when, at his inauguration, President Bola Tinubu announced an end to the costly petrol subsidy as

Rivers, Bayelsa ex-warlords press for share of pipeline surveillance contract

Jeremy Godson, Port Harcourt

S
ome ex-warlords in the Rivers and Bayelsa State axis met in Okrika area of Rivers State to press for a share of the pipeline surveillance contract since granted to Tanti-tta Security Services Limited.

The contract has recent-ly been renewed but some groups want a slice of the $50 million per month action. Many groups in the oil re-gion think the contract should have been split in the states so that most ex-militants would be involved. Instead, the job has remained with Tanti-tta owned by a former lead-er of the Movement for the Emanicipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Chief Government Ekpemupolo, also known as Tompolo.

It was learnt that Chief Asa-ri Dokabo, a former warlord who is also into security ser-vices, has continued to raise squads to support and defend President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in Abuja. He was said to have led others to attend a meeting in Okochiri in Okrika, Rivers State, to press for what they called decentralization. He was also said to have met with a king in Okochiri to help cre-ate a way forward.

Our source said the ex-agi-tators believe that the pipeline surveillance job was more suc-cesful when it was shared state by state. Each set of ex-mili-tants protected the length in their state during the late Pres-ident Umaru Musa Yar’Adua administration.

The source gave example of Rivers State where Ateke Tom, Asari, Eghori Papa, and Farah Dagogo allegedly worked in unity.

It was believed that the Okochiri meeting was to react to the renewal of the contract and how they could be part of it under decentralization or even now. They were said to have spoken vehemently against awarding it to one per-son. From faraway Akwa-Ibom State, a stakeholder in the struggle, Ofon Ette (alias General), criticized the contractor for not carrying other fighters in other states along.

Ette said in the year under review, there have been com-plaints from critical stakehold-ers in the struggle from these states. “While I commend the fed-

APC GUBER CANDIDATES:

President Bola Tinubu (4th left), after presenting party flags to All Progressive Congress (APC)’s governorship candidates in the November 11, 2023 governorship election, the candidates are: Imo State, Hope Uzodimma (3rd left); Kogi State, Omido Ahmed Usman (4th right), and Bayelsa State, Timipriye Sylva (3rd right), at the Presidential Villa on Thursday, November 2, 2023.

BOWFT 2023:

Yusuf Alli congra-tulates First Lady, Edo Queens

JOIN ME

LET’S MOVE EDO FORWARD AGAIN

Our forebears have done it before, we can do it again if we work together as brothers and sisters in Edo. – H.E. Godwin Obaseki

CONTINUE ON PG 29

CONTINUE ON PG 29
Abandoned National Library building Abuja may soon collapse

Bob MajiriOghene

Seventeen years ago, Nigeria embarked on a very ambitious project, to build the largest library in Africa. Located between the National Mosque and the National Ecumenical Centre, the National Library was to be a grand edifice in the heart of Abuja where scholars, researchers and the general public would visit to consult and refresh their faculties for nation building and development.

Contract for this multibillion-naira edifice was awarded by the Federal Ministry of Education in 2006 to Reynolds Construction Company (RCC) to the tune of N8,590,226,393. On April 6, 2006, the engines revved, and men and materials moved to site. A support ring at the front of the imposing edifice in Abuja indicates that some of the finest architects, engineers, quantity surveyors and development consultants like O看待ye International Associates, BQC Consultants Limited Ltd, Techjob Associates, Mekon Associates, Ethe Aro & Partners, McCadog Associates and Odelye Associates were to be part of the project.

Together, the problems started with revision of the costs for the completion of the project from N8,590,226,393 to N17 billion, to N38 billion, and now to nearly 100 billion as at today’s prices.

But while the National Mosque and the Ecumenical Centre have been completed and have been up and running for several years, the National Library of Nigeria is abandoned. When we visited the complex in Abuja recently, we found it completely overrun by weeds. Various construction materials like a giant crane remain in limbo, construction materials like a overrun by weeds. Various studies indicate that some of the finest architects, engineers, quantity surveyors and development consultants like Odsenye International Associates, BQC Consultants Limited Ltd, Techjob Associates, Mekon Associates, Ethe Aro & Partners, McCadog Associates and Odelye Associates were to be part of the project.

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But while the National Mosque and the Ecumenical Centre have been completed and have been up and running for several years, the National Library of Nigeria is abandoned. When we visited the complex in Abuja recently, we found it completely overrun by weeds. Various construction materials like a giant crane remain in limbo, suspended in time and space.

Rain water has eaten deep into the sensitive parts of the build-

ing and it is only a matter of time before the building goes down. (See link: https://youtu.be/shorts/RIEd2OQynV1- feature-share)

Word around indicates that during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, he put in a strong argument in favour of the completion of the National Library Complex. Sources at the Federal Ministry of Education told us that it was the Education Minister who appeared slow with reviving interest with the construction of the library.

Our investigations reveal that the issues with the funding of the project range from exchange rate fluctuations to other variables. Consequently, the project was stopped in 2013. Our sources told us that in 2019, the Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, said the Federal Government was “pursuing alternatives of funding, especially from special inter-vension funding window to complete the abandoned project.”

There has been some talk that Buhari administration approved the takeover and financing of the multi-billion library edifice by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) Yet, as at October 26, 2023, the National Library building lies very falling, very abandoned and is an eyesore on the Abuja skyline.

This investigation has con-tacted key parties involved with the construction of the National Library to find out if there is an update on the pro-ject. A representative of the RCC, Mr. Sunday from the Ibadan office of the company, did not show up at the time he fixed for our scheduled inter-view. The company did not respond to our interview ques-tions sent to their email as at the time of concluding this re-port. All the other companies associated with the construction of the National Library were silent on the matter.

Our AI sources said that libraries play a crucial role in national development. They are essential in promoting literacy, fostering a love for reading, and serving as inclusive spaces where individuals can gather, explore, and enrich their lives. With their mission to empower and educate communities, public libraries are vital pillars of lifelong learning and social development. Libraries provide a network of delivery sites for government programmes and services, advance digital inclusion through access to ICT, and dedicated staff to help people develop new digital skills.

The inclusion of library communities in the development of national strategies will offer them the opportunity to contribute towards the advancement of development priorities. Libraries are essential in preserving and providing access to the world’s culture and heritage. Libraries are essential in promoting literacy, fostering a love for reading, providing access to information, supporting literacy and ICT skills, providing community space, preserving culture and heritage, and contributing towards the advancement of development priorities.

Analysts told us that there are vested interests in the construction of the National Library of Nigeria. Tony Osasu, journalist, said that prior to his disengagement from power, former President Obasanjo Obasanjo brought in several multinationals seeking their help with contributions towards the development of the Na-tional Library. The amount realized was close to N6 billion. He, however, alleged that the fund was diverted to personal projects.

A development expert, Tony Aboh, said one of the reasons why libraries are not accorded much attention in Nigeria is that the people may not know that he cannot prove the value chain for her cultural produce, she has been gathering with issues like rising costs of fertilizers and pesticides due to inflation. She also faces stiff competition from import- ed agricultural produce and is keen on finding ways to im-prove the value chain for her locally grown goods. “Transportation challenges make it hard to get her products to market, affecting both my income and the availability of fresh produce for consum-ers,” she said.

Mr. Adebayo, who owns a printing press on Airport Road in Benin City, lamented the increase in government taxation and levies, unreliable power supply that disrupt-ed his work and hindered his ability to meet his financial obligations, delayed delivery of printing materials he ordered from overseas, as well as high import duties he had to settle. When asked how he man-aged to maintain quality printing standards amid these challenges, he said he had been exceptionally efficient due to the inconsistencies in material supply and skilled labour.

“Only hope is that col-lective efforts, innovative solu-tions, and advocacy for sup-portive policies will pave the way for a more favourable and conducive environment for all SMEs to thrive and overcome these substantial challenges,” he said.
EDITORIAL

Politicizing is over, it's time to build Nigeria

Nigeria’s 2023 political elections have come and gone. Doubts and contentions have been raised about the declared outcomes and been pursued to the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, which last week upheld Mr. Bola Tinubu as the duly elected President of Nigeria.

That decision may not take away the doubts and convictions in the minds of many regarding the integrity, identity and certification of some individuals in the system. It may also not take away personal opinions and convictions of many concerning the conduct of the elections and promises, partly fulfilled or unfulfilled altogether, by the officiating body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to fully deploy the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and other perceived anomalies.

The constitutional definition of the Federal Capital Territorial Administration, Abuja and its consideration in national elections have also been tumbled, shuffled and redefined.

Whatever the case, the disputants and sundry Nigerians affected or interested in the matter can rest assured that they have gone the whole hog in expressing their doubts and reservations and seeking redress through lawful channels. They can further take solace in the fact that they have properly documented their reservations in the matter for today and for posterity.

As such, it would appear that it is time to sheath the sword as contentions and disagreements are a means to an end and not an end unto themselves.

That said, there are a few lessons to be taken away from the exercise. For one, it kept on recurring in the courts that the legal representatives of those questioning the integrity of the elections frequently failed to follow the technicality of the law as regards the presentation of facts backed by evidence.

So going forward, political parties involved in the elections need to put facilities in place by which they can get evidence by way of result sheets from as many of the polling units nationwide as may be necessary to support their claims. This may not be an easy task as technology stands today, it can be accomplished.

Also, INEC needs to be up and doing so as to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections, to be transparent in its process by continuing to show interest, register and vote in future elections because a loss of faith or tiredness is tantamount to surrendering responsibility for the collective good to political merchants and sundry mercenaries.

Then again, given that the matter has gone all the way to the Supreme Court and been decided, it is clear that the time for politicising is over and that it is now time for governance.

It is time for the political parties and other stakeholders to focus on cooperation because these are trying times, the sky is overcast with foreboding and the well-being of over 200 million Nigerians is at stake. Beyond mouthing magnanimity, President Tinubu should walk the talk and embrace, confer and work with individuals and groups of all shades of opinion with a view to lifting Nigeria out of this real and present quagmire.

Also, going forward, parties outside the APC should play their roles in the operation of the nation to present checks, balances and cooperation, with a purpose for the uplifting of the nation.

Several sectors of the national economy are in need of re-engineering and revamping. The educational sector is plagued by poor funding, with budgetary allocation far away from the 26 percent of national budget recommended by the UN. Agric sector faces many challenges which impact on its productivity.

The majority of the country’s strategic roads are in disrepair, causing a hindrance to movement of goods and services and export capacity. The power sector is not doing any better. Petroleum products refining is hindered by inconsistent government priorities, cronysm and corruption, weak political will, unstructured refinery licensing scheme, security challenges and economic factors.

In view of this, all stakeholders need to set aside their differences at this critical time and work together to resolve these challenges inhibiting the growth of the national economy.

Comment

Still on restructuring: Time for true fiscal federalism, new revenue formula

Jibunma Anthony-Spinks

In his Independence broadcast on October 1st 2023, Governor Godwin Obaseki of Edo State cited the need to overcome the deplorable state of federal roads in Edo State, particularly Benin metropolis, and called on the federal authorities to delve deeper into greater autonomy and financial resources to the states and local governments by increasing their share of the national revenue allocation. Obaseki was not alone. As a matter of fact, all heads of government at state and local government levels have been consistently crying out over the years to no avail. In 2017, Governor Nyesome Wike of Rivers State said that “true fiscal federalism will strengthen the economy of the country as all sections will develop based on their comparative advantages.”

This posture, on several occasions at that time, threw him up into a collision course with the power brokers in Abuja where, ironically, he is presently serving as a minister under his former political foes.

The argument against the states has often been the same pedestaled sarcasm: What have the governors done with the previous allocations given to them? Won't local government chairmen use the funds to marry more wives? But if one must push that self-defeating argument, as lazy as it is, what exactly has the federal authorities done with the large chunk they have cornered for themselves over the years? Much of this back and forth arises from the fact that everyone at rejigging the revenue sharing formula is either perceived as self-defeating. The restructuring or for resource control, both of which appear like monsters in the eyes of certain category of the ruling elite. The reason for this perception continues to defy every human logic. To them, restructuring is a recipe for secession, likewise aggravation for resource control and fiscal federalism.

On the contrary, the generality of Nigerians believe that if Nigeria were a building, it would have since collapsed in the absence of a new bulwark to hold it together. If, for instance, all the budgetary provisions for construction and maintenance of the so-called federal roads together with the roads are transferred into the states’ own share of federal revenue, how will that lead to secession? At any rate, most states already bear the burden of taking it upon themselves to reconstruct and carry out maintenance work on most of these federal roads. Even if one argues that some state roads are death-traps, what will federal roads be called other than graveyards?

The term fiscal federalism was introduced into public finance by the German, Richard Musgrave, in 1959. It deals with the division of governmental functions and financial relations among different levels of government: federal, state, and local governments. As defined by Wikipedia, the term deals with “understanding which functions and instruments are best centralised and which best placed in the sphere of decentralized levels of government.”

As presently configured, the sharing formula allocates 52.68% of the country’s revenue, most of which comes from crude oil exports, to the federal government, 26.72% to the state governments, and 20.60% to the local governments. Under the immediate past regime of former President Muhammadu Buhari, a new formula was proposed which was more or less like cutting a little more piece of the cake to the birthday child to make his birthday less boring! 45.17%, 29.79%, and 21.04% were proposed for federal, state, and local governments, respectively. Expectedly, this formula appears to have died a natural death; and with the bottomless bucket of socio-economic and political head-aches plaguing the present occupants of Aso Rock, any attempt to tinker with the issue of revenue allocation may further obfuscate its predication.

From the reports contained in a research conducted by Victor I. Lukpata, of the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, from as far back as 1946 when the Regional Governments were granted internal autonomy by the Richard’s Constitution till date, the sharing formula appears to have always been subjected to all kinds of tinkering. One of the most problematic issues under the Babangida regime was the revenue sharing formula, so much so that Babangida had to review the revenue allocation four times during his tenure. From the inception of the Babangida regime in 1985 up until 1989, the formula of revenue allocation stood at Federal – 55%, State – 32.5%, Local Government – 10%. Allocation to the oil mineral producing states and general ecological problems stood at 1.5% each, respectively.

According to Lukpata, between 1990 and June 1992 there were about four revisions to the revenue allocation formula. However, the formula in June 1992 was more important because of the inability of local governments to effectively administer primary education. Consequently, the vertical revenue allocation formula was revised and the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) accepted the following revenue arrangement: Federal Government – 45.5%; State Government – 24%; Local Government – 20%, Special Funds – 7.5%.
FG urges water contractors to adhere to project specifications

FELICITY OGU

The Federal Government has urged its contractors participating in the Partnership for Expanded Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (PェWASH) programme to adhere to standards and specifications for the benefit of the rural populace.

Director of Water Supply and Support Services in the Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, Dr Nicholas Madu, made this call at the 2022/2023 PェWASH Project Implementation Take-Off Meeting in Abuja on Thursday, News Agency of Nigeria reports.

He said the federal government would not tolerate sharp practices and shoddy projects, adding that the programme is an opportunity to improve access to potable water supply for rural communities.

According to him, the take-off meeting was to familiarise the contractors with the necessary procurement processes.

"It is important because we want to be sure of the quality of the services we are providing for Nigerians. So, we are going to hold the contractors strictly accountable for that," Madu said.

"And in certifying their jobs, we will not accept anything short of the standards that we have set in our documents, so we must emphasise that and we insist on that," he said.

Madu noted that the PェWASH 2022/2023 programme being implemented in five states of Kaduna, Katsina, Delta, Gombe and Nasarawa had been approved as contained in the Protocol signed with the five state governments.

He said it was a national collaboration with all stakeholders to fill access gaps in water supply and sanitation in rural communities, adding that it would contribute to improvements in public health and eradication of poverty.

Madu further pledged government’s commitment to fulfilling its obligations by providing the necessary resources, saying that qualitative and timely project delivery is crucial.

He said the programme, which commenced implementation with two states with Kano and Ogun in 2016, considers the enthusiasm with which the programme was accepted by stakeholders, Wazako said.

"This is a demonstration of the country’s determination to achieve the objective for which the programme was established," he said.

NEWS

Oboeworri lauds Nigerian Air Force on war against terrorism

AJIWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor Sheriff Oborevwori on Thursday commended the Nigerian Air Force for its contribution to the war against insurgency and terrorism in the country.

Governor Oborevwori gave the commendation when the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Special Operations Command, Nigerian Air Force, Air Vice Marshal Eko Efionm, led a delegation of Air Officers to visit him at Government House, Asaba.

He particularly commended the AOC for the numerous accolades garnered over the years and for being instrumental to the successes achieved towards tackling the threat posed by terrorist groups in the North East.

"We welcome the AOC and his team to Delta State. I commend you for an outstanding career, you have had in the Nigerian Air Force," the governor said.

"Your commandant in Delta State, they have been very wonderful and supportive of my administration.

"In my M.O.R.E Agenda, I have told Deltans that we will enhance peace and security and that is what we are doing.

"We have not heard of any serious security issue in the last few months, there is no way you eradicate crime completely but the major ones have been curbed.

"Your commandant in Delta State, is doing very well, he has never missed any security council meeting and I want to assure you that we will give you all the support that is needed to do your job," he stated.

Earlier, Air Vice Marshal Efionm said he was in the state on an operational visit and one of the units under his command in Warri.

"I and my visit was to ascertain how they were faring with a view to knowing their challenges and how to resolve them.

"My operational unit has spoken very well about the support that the state has given them.

"Despite that the unit is in Warri, I needed to drive to Asaba to say thank you to you for the support so far being extended to the Air Force unit.

"I want to assure you that we will continue to support the state towards dealing with security issues here in the state. From what we have seen, it is not too much of a problem and that attests to the level of lead- ership here in the state.

"But whatever area you need the Nigerian Air Force to address issues in the state, we assure you of our cooperation. The unit here is doing very well," he stated.

The oath of office administered on Thursday supervised the oath of office administered on the new senator representing Kogi Central Senatorial District, Nataasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

"The PEWASH National Coordinator, Mrs Jummai Wazako, said the programme was designed for the improvement of rural water supply and sanitation towards the achievement of SDG.

"This was Wazako said, was to increase access to water supply and sanitation to address the pathetic situation of reported increase in the number of people dying from avoidable water and sanitation-related diseases in the communities.

"The PEWASH programme, which commenced implementation with two states with Kano and Ogun in 2016, considers the enthusiasm with which the programme was accepted by stakeholders," Wazako said.

"This is a demonstration of the country's determination to achieve the objective for which the programme was established," he said.

Hamas/Israelii hostilities:
Civilians leaving Gaza wait to board a bus as dual national Palestinians and foreigners prepare to cross the Rafah border point with Egypt, in the southern Gaza Strip, on November 2, 2023.

PHOTO BY MOHAMMED ABED /AFP

NIDCOM, TAC strengthen collaboration to bolster diaspora integration

CAROLINE AMEI

In a bid to enhance the integration and welfare of labour migrants in foreign countries, Chairman/CEO of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa emphasised the importance of providing guidance to volunteers before they depart Nigeria.

She stressed the necessity of equipping them with the knowledge and skills to effectively interact with their host countries and the Nigerian communities abroad.

In response, Hon. Yakubu echoed the urgency of bridging the gap between Nigerian Missions and the diaspora communities.

He called for a significant shift in the approach to engaging with the Diaspora and the establishment of dedicated desk offices in foreign missions.

"When we deploy volunteers for soft power, we are expanding the Diaspora community that you interact with. Hence, there is a substantial amount of work to be done collaboratively, particularly to ensure that they project a positive image of our country abroad," Yakubu stated.

TAC is a parastatal under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, functioning as Nigeria’s instrument of soft diplomacy.

It was established in 1985 during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, with the primary purpose of dispatching Nigerian professionals abroad to engage in volunteer work.

Akpabio swears in Akpoti-Uduaghan as Kogi Central Senator

CAROLINE AMEI

Senator President Godswill Akpabio during plenary on Thursday supervised the oath of office administered on the new senator representing Kogi Central Senatorial District, Nataasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

The oath was administered on her by the Clerk of the Senate, Mr Chiemelu Akhazue, at about 11:41 am. She thereafter proceeded to have a handshake with the Senator President who handed over to her a copy of the Senate Standing Rules.

She was later led to her seat by the sergeant at arms after exchange of pleasantries with her colleagues.

The Court of Appeal, Abuja Division, had on Monday affirmed that Akpoti-Uduaghan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was the duly elected candidate for Kogi Central Senatorial Election on February 5 2023.

The appellate court dismissed the appeal filed by Senator Abubakar Ohere for lacking in merit.

Earlier in September, the Kogi State Election Petition Tribunal sitting in Lokoja had nullified the victory of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

The court further declared that Akpoti-Uduaghan was the actual winner of the February senatorial poll.

However, Ohere had appealed to the appellate court to seek redress but the court further upheld Akpoti-Uduaghan as the winner of the poll.
Obaseki orders reconstruction of old Benin-Agbor Road

...as palliative work begins on failed portions of FG roads

**Ajuba Victor**

The Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki, has directed the reconstruction of the old Benin-Agbor Road. This is as the State Government commenced palliative work on the failed portions of the Federal Government-owned Benin-Agbor Road in Igapo/Okha Local Government Area of the state and others to ameliorate the suffering of motorists and other road users who ply the road. Obaseki, who inspected the ongoing palliative work, being undertaken by the State Government following the failure of the Federal Government to attend to the road and other failed federal roads across the state, lamented the poor condition of the road and the hardship imposed on the people due to the poor state of the road.

Obaseki immediately directed the reconstruction of the old Benin-Agbor Road as a last-ditch effort by the state government to end the sufferings of the people and commuters using the failed road. He ordered the Commissioner for Roads and Bridges, Engr. Ethan Uzamure, who was part of the inspection team, to immediately mobilise contractors to the site.

Filled with joy and relief by the directive of the governor, the excited crowd commended and sang his praises for heading their cries and pleas to end their sufferings and pains as a result of the hardship they go through daily commuting on the bad road.

“I know that you people have been suffering for more than three months now. Your markets have gone down and you cannot even get to your homes,” Obaseki said.

He thanked the youths for their effort in maintaining order, commending them for being peaceful despite the suffering.

“The situation you have here today is beyond the state government. This is a palliative work we are doing, it is remedial action and we have to go and look for money to do it so that we can ease the suffering,” the governor said.

“This road as you know is not our road. It’s a federal road and the Federal Government has sold this road to somebody. They said they did a concession many years ago, about three years ago. So, they will not allow us to touch it. This one we are doing is by force because they know they cannot stop us and you but they are not going to refund us one lobo and we are not even going to worry asking them to refund us.”

“The permanent solution is, because this road is not our own and the Federal Government has refused to fix this road, we will now go and construct the old road which is ours. “So, we will start the reconstruction of the old road this dry season and as usual we will put up barricades. No motorist will be allowed. If the Federal Government likes, let them not do this road. The minister is from the South East and this is the main road to the South East. So, if he doesn’t want his people to go for Christmas, he is on his own. We will look for a way to get to our homes,” he said.

He pleaded with the people to remain law-abiding and peaceful, promising that the government would do everything possible to ensure the road is opened in two weeks’ time.

**NDDC says ready to partner PH Club to boost social activities in state capital**

**Ajuba Victor**

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has stated its readiness to partner Port Harcourt Club to boost social activities in the Rivers State capital.

Managing Director of the NDDC, Dr. Samuel Ogbokulu, stated this when the executive members of the club paid him a courtesy call in his office at the NDDC headquarters in Port Harcourt on Tuesday.

Ogbokulu said the commission was open to a sustainable relationship that would bring back the past glory of Port Harcourt city so that the older generation would be proud that in their time the social life in the Garden City was revived.

He recalled with nostalgia the serene atmosphere created by the older generation, insisting that such beautiful scenery would be revived to keep the old memories alive.

He promised to galvanise progressive residents of the city to pool resources to build a society that would be stronger and socially active, saying the present generation would not allow social activities in the city to stagnate or retrogress.

The NDDC chief specifically requested the visit of the W.W. White football team among secondary school students in the state.

“While growing up in the city of Port Harcourt, it was through the football competition that students in secondary schools were brought together in the state to socialize,” he said.

Also speaking, President of the Port Harcourt Club, Hon. Soberekon Dikibo, congratulated Ogbokulu on his reappointment as the NDDC Managing Director, saying President Bola Tinubu made the right choice.

The leadership and members of the Port Harcourt Club conferred on the Ogbokulu an honorary membership of the Club, which was a mark of honour.

Hon. Dikibo, who conferred the special membership on Ogbokulu, said, "Though membership follows a strict process of nomination and subscription, it was customary of the club to offer the membership to deserving public officials such as service chiefs and heads of selected federal parastatals serving in the state."

The Port Harcourt Club, founded in 1929, is a family-oriented sports and recreational club with over 1,800 members.

**Delta Deputy Gov decry state of cultism in Nigeria**

**Ajuba Victor**

The Deputy Governor of Delta State, Sunday Onyeme, has decried the spate of cultism in the Nigerian society.

Onyeme, who spoke on Wednesday when he received members of the Police Campaign Against Cultism and Other Vices (POCACOV) in his office in Government House, Asaba, noted that cultism has devastating effects on the youths in particular and called on all Nigerians to be involved in the fight against the menace for the future of the country.

"Whichever way anybody may look at it, cultism has not done this nation any good. It is a horrible, negative vice that has eaten deep into our society. Anybody who can reverse the direction and make our people not to be interested, not to engage in cultism, that person is a real patriotic Nigerian that wishes Nigeria and humanity good," Onyeme said.

"We need to recruit as many people as possible to fight cultism. If we do not re-educate as many people as possible and if we do not live by example, show an example to people that cultism is not a good thing, there will be a lot of challenges for our country in the future. "So, you preach to people to make a difference and that is the only way we can rev our society so that all of us can feel safe, so that we can be comfortable that our children will be safe when we send them to school and other places.

"All of us desire good things, all of us desire Nigeria to be good, and we should sincerely work to make Nigeria a good place," he said.

The Deputy Governor commended the members of POCACOV on their well-deserved legal triumphs at the Court of Appeal, which affirmed them as the duly elected representatives of their various Federal and State Constituencies.

The felicitations were contained in a congratulatory statement on Wednesday by the Delta State Publicity Secretary, Delta PDP, Dr. Ifeanyi Osuoza. The members are Hon. Victor Nwokolu (Rchi Federal Constituency), Chief Thomas Erigwe (Warri Federal Constituency), Hon. Nnabde Eche (Ndokwa/Uluni Federal Constituency), Hon. Emmanuel Sime (Patani State Constituency), and Hon. Bridget Anyafu/Ihinds (Sape State Constituency). The statement observed that the legal declarations were an unequivocal confirmation of the party’s undisputed victory in the elections.

"Your legal victories are a confirmation of the desires of Delta in your constituencies, where you have always reposed your unwavering confidence in your capacities to perform and are fully convinced that you will ensure that the people of your constituencies enjoy democracy to them with your excellent representation."

"Delta PDP as one big family, salutes your victory and assures you that we are always ready and willing to provide all the needed and necessary support you require," the statement said.

**Delta PDP hails lawmakers on appeal court victories**

**Ajuba Victor**

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Delta State has warmly congratulated its members on their well-deserved legal triumphs at the Court of Appeal, which affirmed them as the duly elected representatives of their various Federal and State Constituencies.

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"Your legal victories are a confirmation of the desires of Del- tans in your constituencies, where you have always reposed your un-
Since the invention of the smartphone, romance scam has always had its own fair share of mischief on people, leaving them depressed or better still making them lose trust in everyone and everything around them. It also leaves the victims with huge loss or debt for those who might have borrowed.

Romance scam is a confidence trick which involves the scammer feigning romantic intentions towards a victim, often referred to as a “client”, gaining the victim’s affection and then using that goodwill to get the victim to send money under false pretenses with the intention to commit fraud against the victim.

It is crucial to note that these scammers often dedicate their time and resources in getting their victim’s attention, making them fall in love with them, and winning their trust. However, they never agree to meet their victim in person or even accept video calls. To avoid being caught or questioned, they always have already cooked-up lies to dish out to their potential victims.

“Online dating can be a wonderful way to find love, but it’s important to be cautious. Remember, genuine relationships are built on trust and shared experiences, not on financial demands. So, keep your heart open but your wallet closed to potential scammers, and you’ll be on your way to safer online dating,” Wahlstrom says in the article “Protect Your Heart (and Wallet): Understanding Romance Scams.”

Romance scammers make use of manipulation tactics. They create a feeling of mutual trust while aiming to con the victim out of their money. In 2022, over 70,000 people fell victim of romance scams resulting in the loss of a staggering $1.3 billion, according to ABC News.

Being aware and careful of how romance scammers operate is very important in not falling victim to their schemes, says Themba Wahlstrom, a Digital Media Creative, Video Producer and Fine Art Photographer, in an article on Truecaller.com. To protect yourself from romance scammers, Wahlstrom advises as follows:

*Be careful when someone online professes their love too quickly. Scammers often rush the process.*

*Search for their photos or descriptions online to see if they’ve been used in other scams. Reverse image search and see if a profile linked to someone else appears.*

*Never send money to someone you haven’t met in person, no matter how convincing their story sounds.*

*Share your online dating experiences with friends or family. They can offer advice and keep you grounded.*

“If you suspect you’re talking to a scammer, report them to the dating producer and Fine Art Photographer, Digital Media Creative, Video Producer and Fine Art Photographer, in an article on Truecaller.com. To protect yourself from romance scammers, Wahlstrom advises as follows:

Favour Negrese

Divorces appear very common these as people prioritize personal happiness and growth. However, the more accurate fact seems to be that with the coming of the internet and social media apps like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and so on, information travels a lot faster and people in different parts of the world get to hear about these things faster than they ever did.

According to Forbes Advisor, trends in divorce have changed over time, with the number of people dissolving their unions decreasing. In the United States, for instance, both the marriage and divorce rate have declined over time.

“In 2000, a total of 944,000 divorces and annulments occurred. The crude divorce rate was 4.0 per population during that year. By 2021, it had fallen to 2.5 per 1,000 population, with just 689,308 people divorcing that year,” says Adam Ramirez in an article on Forbes Advisor.

“The marriage rate has declined too, dropping from 8.2 per population in 2000 to 6.00 per population in 2021.”

What may have changed is the way people perceive divorce, which is a reflection of the changing dynamics of relationships. People are seeking independence and fulfillment, leading to a higher acceptance of divorce as a means of finding personal happiness. With advancements in technology, relationships have undergone significant changes. The fast-paced nature of modern life, increased work pressures, and evolving gender roles have all contributed to the way people perceived relationships or marriages.

People are now more empowered to prioritize their own happiness and well-being, leading to a greater willingness to end unhappy or unfulfilling marriages.

Nearly 70 percent of divorces are initiated by the wife, according to The Jimenez Law Firm. In addition, over 50 percent of divorced wives never want to remarry while only about 30 percent of men express that same sentiment.

As people prioritize personal happiness, some also go into marriages with transactional intentions. Getting an annulment is expensive as one partner, most especially the woman, walks away with a lot of money as settlements.

Divorces are now used as a quick means to get rich. This is more common with celebrities as the world sees and hears news about them.

In April 2023, the internet and social media were awash with the news of popular football player Hakimi whose wife was said to have demanded more than half of his properties as part of her divorce settlement. During the ongoing divorce proceedings, it was revealed that Hakimi, 24, had placed 80 percent of his wealth in his mother’s name, including houses, cars, clothes, jewelry, and money.

The world has witnessed many expensive divorces in recent years. The divorce between Bill Gates, former CEO of Microsoft, and his wife Melinda Gates in 2021 is the most expensive so far, with Melinda getting $76 billion.

Jeff Bezos’ divorce in 2019 from MacKenzie Bezos is the second most expensive, with MacKenzie Bezos getting $38 billion ($43.5 billion in inflation adjusted).

Madonna, a female celebrity, paid her ex-husband a large sum of money between $76 million-$96 million for their divorce settlement.

The divorce of popular Nigerian artist Peter Okoye and his ex-wife Aniata is also another example. The couple got married in 2014 and divorced in December 2022. Anita requested a monthly settlement of $20,000 but it was not granted to her by the court.

Popular Nollywood actor Bolanle Ninalowo also announced that his 17-year marriage with Bunmi Nina-lowo had come to an end. The former couple had two children. He stated he and his wife had to make the inescapable decision for the sake of a “peaceful and loveable future.” He also cited their children and his mental health, among other reasons, for the painful decision.

But divorce can also have emotional and financial implications. It’s crucial for individuals to approach divorce with open communication, understanding, and support to navigate this challenging process. It is also essential for society to provide support systems and resources to help individuals navigate the emotional and practical challenges that come with divorce.
A

dulthood ceremony is a unique celebration, it is the rite-of-passage that guides a young man into adulthood.

Adulthood ceremonies can range from a simple occasion to extraordinary event that covers days and culminates in a special moment. Nigerians typically celebrate rites of passage with music, dance and ceremony. At his or her naming ceremony a child becomes a member of the community. In Ibenafe community, South Ibie, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, an adolescent assumes the responsibilities of adulthood at initiation.

Adulthood festival is called “out”, and the festival is celebrated every year. Benin community is one of the villages that make up South Ibie Clan. The yearly festival is celebrated among the youths within the age bracket of seventeen to nineteen years, both male and female. The adulthood ceremony is performed in the month of Dhul Hijja in Islamic calendar, specifically the tenth day of the month when Eid el-Kahre Sallah Festival is celebrated. The ceremony is not restricted, it is open to both girls and boys of the same age.

A male child matures faster than his peers is likely to be initiated ahead of his mates. To start the ceremony, all the age-group will assemble at the king’s square, venue of the ceremony. When all is set, a representative from the immediate senior age group comes to the centre of the arena with a gun. He calls on the president of the new age group to stand up and move to the centre of the arena. While standing, the representative, at the top of his voice, will call the initiates seven times and their president will answer seven times also at the top of his voice. The call is followed immediately by shooting into the air. The representative calls the president of the initiates in a special dialect, saying, “Omorosalengbomi”, to which the president replies, “Eiyah!”. This literally means the “new initiates” to which the president replies that “we are here”. After this ceremonial call by the representative from the immediate senior age group and the subsequent response, the ceremony starts. Songs of praise are both indigenous and collectively rendered by well-wishers, to which they all dance. The ceremony is for a period of seven days with live music playing all night and day long.

THE CEREMONY Ceremoney INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING:

Ekpo (Dress Code): Every member of the age group has a uniform dress code they wear on particular days. On the first and the last day of the festival, the age-group members must wear their clothes; however, they must wear the traditional beads and red cap to identify themselves.

Enhale (Food): All male members of the age-group are expected cook food and bring to the venue; they have a time table among themselves for cooking on daily basis for both day and night. There is a committee that monitors the food and equally shares the food among the age group members and visitors.

Efoye (Ritual Process): The Efoye aspect of the ceremony is the process of casting away all the evils associated with adolescence. The Efoye is usually done on the 6th day; a day before the end of the festival. Every male member of the age group will cross an elderly woman who has stopped menstruating and who he can never have sexual contact with till he dies. Thereafter, the individual will move straight to a nearby river or stream to take his bath. The reason for doing this is never to see the downfall of your age-group member and not to plan evil against age group members. Financing: Financing is a major aspect in any association. The age-group members usually start contributing towards the festival three months before the commencement of the festival. They usually do an estimate towards the festival and come out with a specific amount each person will pay. Deadline for payment is two weeks before the start of the festival. The money contributed is managed by the age-group executive members. Record of income and expenditure is kept. The females do not contribute financially. Some of the things they collectively spend money on are: To buy gun powder in the dane gun which will be used at intervals during the ceremony; kola nuts and bottles of wine, which are used individually and collectively to enter guests during the ceremony; and payment to the musician for service rendered during the ceremony.

Illelini (Naming): The age group must be given a name which will be known to the community. The naming is done by the eldest man in the community in conjunction with the council of elders in the village. On that day, immediately after breakfast all the age-group members assemble at the residence of the Odogbogbo (oldest man) in the village. The Odogbogbo comes out to address them, emphasizing the significance of the celebration to the participants, after which he calls out a number of traditional names for the new age-group and requests them to identify themselves with one of them. The Odogbogbo subsequently calls the name seven times, to which the age-group members respond seven times. At the end of the call, a gun is fired into the air by the president of the age-group. From the Odogbogbo’s house, the age-group proceeds on their jubilation and dance round the town. At the end of their town round they all assemble in front of Okhainho’s (king’s) palace. The king welcomes and congratulates them on their achievement. The naming is usually done on third day of the ceremony.

Age (Venue): The festival takes place at a central location in front of the Okhainho’s palace. Bamboo and grass are used to construct a hut where the age-group members will sit for period of seven days; every member of the age-group is expected to participate in building the hut. There is a fine for persons who are conspicuous during the construction.

The male members of the age-group bring chair and tables to the venue for sitting throughout the festivity period.

Otu (Age-group): Every quarter in the community is expected to bring someone within the fifteen-nineteen age bracket, both male and female, to participate in the festival. If any person within the age bracket is in diaspora, a family member can stand in for him/her, and the proxy will participate in every activity of the age-group.

BENEFITS OF AGE GROUP FESTIVAL

The ceremony comes with some benefits for the age-mates. They are largely developmental for the individual and the community. First, it is a taboo for any member to take another to court for whatever offence. Second, it is against traditional practice to plan or carry out any evil act against any age-mate. Third, it is forbidden for any member to seduce an age-mates wife or daughter. Fourth, it is obligatory for new initiates to respect and obey their parents and, by extension, the larger society. It is an offence for one to quarrel with another in the community; it is against traditional practice to engage in a brawl with any of them out of annoyance. Fifth, the initiation ceremony also teaches the initiates never to violate any societal order for communal work even if it involves the call for war against neighbours. Sixth, it encourages independence. Seventh, it discourages childish behaviour as it is against the traditional practice to engage in any kind of conduct. Rites-of-passage help our children to make clear distinctions between past, present and future societal expectations. Finally, it marks the transition into manhood or womanhood as a youth.
Sports

BORWFT 2023:

Yusuf Alli congratulates First Lady, Edo Queens

The Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Olympian Yusuf Alli congratulates the wife of Edo State Governor, Her Excellency Betsy Obaseki and Edo Queens Football Club for the successes recorded in the just concluded 3rd edition of the Betsy Obaseki Women Football Tournament.

The Edo Sports Commission boss said that the annual Nigeria Women Premier Football League pre-season tournament which came to an end on Wednesday evening at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City, was a huge success.

Alli who expressed his joy over Edo Queens victory said that he was also impressed with the performance of the girls throughout the tournament adding that the coach-es and the entire team have shown how ready they are for the new football season.

“I congratulate our mother, Mrs Betsy Obaseki on her birthday this week. We are happy to have a vision- ary First Lady, a big cheering section that was in attendance.

“I urge them to replicate the feat in future,” he said.

Betsy Obaseki Football tournament.

Betsy Obaseki on the hutchfree 2023 Tournament adding that the coach- es were also impressed with the performances of the players.

For Edo Queens, it was another crown as they won the tournament after edging out the 2022 champions of the 3rd of the Betsy Obaseki Preseason Women Football Tournament after edging Bayelsa Queens Football Club of Yenagoa in a penalty shootout. The final match had ended 1-1 at the regulation period of 90 minutes.

In the game proper, Bayelsa Queens took the lead in the 27th minute of play through Blessing Abiola, whose ferocious shot from about 20 yards caught Edo Queens defenders and keeper tunning.

Edo Queens however stepped up their game and later replaced the visitors before halftime as their top striker Eunice Godwin after a neat exchange of passes with Moses Chima, lumped the ball into the top far corner of Bayelsa Queens’ net to re-store parity for the hosts in the 41st minute of play.

The game would have ended 2-1 in favour of Edo Queens without going through the shootouts, as Bayelsa Queens defender handed a goal bound ball in her 18 yards box, within the extra four added minutes to the end of the match which resulted in the referee awarding them a penalty. But there was a mild drama following Abdeen Sulayti’s heart-breaking miss of the resultant penalty, hitting the bar to end the game 1-1 before the shootouts.

During the shootouts, Edo Queens lost its first kick while scoring the other four to defeat Bayelsa Queens who lost their third and final kicks to surrender to the hosts 4-3.

Serie A: Napoli counts cost of Osimhen’s absence

There appears to be a growing concern in Napoli about the current sidelined striker, Victor Osimhen, over the rate of injuries that has seen him miss 35 games so far since joining the club.

It has also been projected that the forecast will rise to 58 because Osimhen still has at least three more matches to miss against Salernitana, Union Berlin and Empoli, Sports Village Square reports.

According to an Italian news outlet in Naples, Tuttanapoli, Osimhen also missed three matches due to suspension bringing the total to 61 missed matches in three seasons.

According to the publication, it was considered that “61 games is a lot for a player with a net salary of five million a year.”

It reasoned that Napoli paid more than a year of salary to Osimhen without being able to count on him, remembering that an average season has about 50 games a year between league and cups.

Osimhen is a repeat offender: according to Transfermarkt which gave a breakdown of Osimhen’s missed matches. The first was in November with the problem behind him in the national team.

He was out of action for 15 games. Then he missed six with Covid three more with a head injury in February 2021 and two more with a calf strain in October of the same year.

Shortly after, due to a fractured cheekbone against Inter for the clash with Schirra, he was out of action for 12 games and missed two more, again in the 2021/22 season, due to Covid.

Last year he was knocked out by Liverpool out seven games. He was also out in the spring for four games due to an adductor injury.

Coco Gauff beats Jabeur to win her first-ever WTA

Coco-Gauff finally got her first win at the WTA Finals on Monday after she completely crushed Ons Jabeur in two sets.

The last time Coco Gauff and Ons Jabeur played was at an event in China where Jabeur won a trophy at the Ningbo event. Gauff took part in the China Open and played well but got beaten by Iga Swiatek rather comfortably.

Neither ever played in Can- cun, so both needed to adjust once they stepped on the court. Tennis-infinity.com reports.

As pundits predicted in the preview, Gauff adjusted better and completely crushed Jabeur, who had been quite erratic in the set. She didn’t serve well, and that created a lot of problems, but she couldn’t keep the ball in play either.

She totaled 12 unforced errors in those six games of play, which is a lot. It mostly came from Gauff being able to track down every ball, causing Jabeur to try and overhit in re- sponse to that. It’s a bad tactic and wasn’t going to work, as the score demonstrates well.

After one game in the sec- ond set, the play was aban- doned due to rain.

The match continued af- ter about an hour. Jabeur kept struggling with her control slamming more balls wide by the time the match was over Jabeur totaled 27 unforced er- rors which looked appalling next to only 5 winners.