

NIDCOM

NIGERIANS IN DIASPORA COMMISSION



DIASPORA NEWSLETTER



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HOW I PLAN TO TAKE DIASPORA AFFAIRS TO THE NEXT LEVEL - DABIRI-EREWA

By Khadija Shehu Bamalli

We will start by taking a brief background on you.

I am the Chairman/CEO, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, formally SSA to the President, formally in the parliament where I spent 12 years and was the Chairman House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora, formally at the Nigerian Television Authority where I worked for 15 years. I am a graduate of University of Ife, where I studied English Language. I did my Masters in University of Lagos, in Mass Communication. I was also at Harvard University, Kennedy school of Government. Primary school; Maryland Government School Ikeja, Secondary School, St. Louis College, Ibadan. I am a mother of two children, a grandmother and I have a wonderful husband and great staffs working with me in NiDCOM.



deal with human capital development. We are talking of Nigerians succeeding all over the world and our mission is to engage them in the programmes and policies of Government. I'm glad that we have some programmes in place like Nigerian Diaspora Investment Trust Fund, Nigerian Diaspora Investment Summit, the Diaspora voting bill which has gone through second reading. we have also been able to intervene in cases of Nigerians in the Diaspora. For good, for bad we are always there for Nigerians in the Diaspora when we can, so hard work keeps me going.

Looking at your mandate, how far has diaspora investment gone throughout the country, this year?

A lot of Diasporas are beginning to invest in Health care, agriculture, education and the food business. We are very impressed about that and a lot of them are even looking at small businesses that generates employment. Diaspora engagement is growing in Nigeria and we are also glad that CBN has put in place a policy where Diaspora remittances are received in the currencies that were being remitted in, so the diaspora are very excited about that.

Holding the NDIS virtually for the first time, will you say it was as successful and effective as the previous ones done physically?

If I have to admit, it was even more successful because we had more participants and it is going to be the new normal, that's the positive side of Covid-19 for us in NiDCOM. It is easier now to communicate with Nigerians all over the world. In the past, we have to find a way to get them home, some will need accommodation, you have to look for money for ticket.

Amidst several challenges, what motivates you to keep driving NiDCOM forward?

In NiDCOM, we have a mission and a vision we have to achieve. Despite the challenges, we have to keep working to ensure we succeed but the good thing is that, I've got great staff working here at the Commission. So, we don't look at challenges, we see challenges as opportunities and we continue to work at that. The key thing is that we



So now it is going to be cheaper and more effective. For instance, this last one, we had Masayo Ujiri from Canada, we had people from America, Africa, from Australia, China, in fact, everywhere in the world participated. So, subsequently it is going to be a hybrid. Some of us in the physical location and others virtually. It is going to be the new normal for us. Since then, we had about five virtual meetings with Nigerians abroad and we want to be having monthly virtual diaspora meetings from now.

The door of return has been an avenue to reconnect hundreds of Nigerians back to their roots, does not holding it this year means hundreds of these kings and queens were not reconnected with their roots?

Which they are actually sad about. I have been getting their messages saying they miss home. This are African Americans, some from the Caribbean, others from Jamaica and all they have been saying is we miss coming home this year.

The reassurance is, God spare our lives, we will all be together next year. We thought of a virtual thing but it is not going to have the effect of the physical one, so that's not what we can do virtually. Some have actually been missing home and like I told them next year is going to be better and bigger and we will all be there to welcome them as Kings and Queens once again.

Looking at the Covid-19 evacuation, which was the first of its kind, what is the major challenge NIDCOM faced during and beyond the evacuation process?

Sigh! No funding for logistics but we were still at it. We had people we were communicating with. We went digital, we opened a portal, which made it easy to communicate. Like I said, we never look at challenges, we are always there, you find that little things matter. Sometimes it is just a single information missing and we are able to provide it. When they return, they had to ensure they follow NCDC protocols. Ours was just to ensure we sorted the communication link and did our own bit. We did the job and we are glad we did it.

Were there any measures put in place to monitor the evacuees to ensure compliance from their part?

That will be NCDC and we had the PTF on COVID-19. We did what we had to do and that wasn't our responsibility but I believe it was effectively handled.

To what effect has the agreement between NIDCOM and Lebanon Embassy yielded positive results towards irregular migration?

At least we haven't heard of any more Nigerian going to Lebanon and being stranded and we are hoping it has nothing to do with the travel restrictions. It is important that Lebanon has now stopped work visas. So if you apply now you cannot get the visa anymore. What we need to do in Nigeria, is to focus on how to make this migration legal the way it is done in the Philippines, you want to migrate, you can go freely legally. Although the case of Lebanon is not irregular migration but the `kafala' system turns you virtually to a slave. You become the slave of your master and that is what we need to change. I hope as we move on these are things we will collaborate with Ministry of Labour, Nigerian Immigration Service, the House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora, Senate Committee on Diaspora and NAPTIP, we all need to work on this.

Has the new CBN policy on foreign exchange help boost Nigeria diaspora remittances?



Absolutely! Apart from boosting remittances, within four days of the CBN announcement, the naira appreciated. Nigerians in diaspora are excited about it and it's one of the things we expected CBN to do and what we are also asking them to do is to reduce the cost of remittances charged by the IMTOs. Nigeria has the largest levies that we are taxing the Diaspora. All over the world, it's six percent but here it is over 9 per cent, so the levies by the IMTOs should actually be reduced. It has been a very good news from CBN to diaspora so we are hoping for more in that regard.

Do you think Diaspora day celebration is achieving the desired results?

Not fully. We don't want it to be just a talk show. Diaspora day has been on for 15 years or more but we want it to go beyond just talking. We want to achieve results. As at the last diaspora day, three Nigerians in the diaspora who participated were invited to join the Economic Planning Development Team and they have been making useful contributions. Beyond that, we have received very cogent recommendations from some of them on the way forward on some certain areas so by next year we will be telling you this is what we achieved from last year

diaspora day celebration, not fully but with the involvement of NIDCOM we want more Nigerians to participate so we achieve results from the conference.

With Nigerians making waves across the globe, what will you say is the attitude of Nigerians towards this global crisis of Covid-19, especially in seeing a lasting solution like production of vaccines?

A Nigerian was involved in provision of Pfizer vaccine and we were able to hold a brilliant conversation with him. Everything he said was on point, relevant and educative. We hope to have more of that and we are glad that a Nigerian was involved. We need to work together with the diaspora, we are in charge of them and that's why we keep celebrating them. Ours is wherever you are, we want to celebrate you, we want to work with you. NIDCOM is here to change the narrative about Nigeria to a positive one. We will keep celebrating ourselves. When you are in the diaspora and you have a problem, we are also there for you. We have been able to intervene in cases of Nigerians who have been in trouble but this is what we keep saying; if you commit a crime you pay for it. You have to pay for it but you

shouldn't be punished for offence you didn't commit. We have been able to intervene, like in the cases of Zainab Aliyu in Saudi Arabia, Suleimon Olufemi in Saudi Arabia, the two guys in kuweisha*, we have had people who returned from places like India, we have been to Brazilian prison, Republic of Benin and we have intervened in South Africa and others. As long as you obey the laws of these countries, we are always there for you, be number one ambassadors and do not disobey the laws of other countries.

Where do you see NIDCOM in the next 10 years?

NIDCOM should have been able to tap fully into the power of the diaspora, we should have been able to have the diaspora play the role they should have played 10 years ago. Other countries have worked with the diaspora, I mean India, Pakistan, Brazil, quite a number of countries cannot talk about their success without the diaspora, even China. So I want NIDCOM to have successfully been able to engage the diaspora, I want us to really be able to say we have this Nigerian in this country and we need your services. NIDCOM should be digital and get appropriate data of

Nigerians abroad. we should be able to have a diaspora complex, where we will be able to have an office, a more befitting office for the Commission. To have seen the staff of NIDCOM grow in such a way that any one of them will have been able to run the organization selflessly, efficiently and diligently, with passion to tap into the issues of the diaspora and who knows, maybe a diaspora ministry.

You still look radiant despite your very busy schedule; do you have any beauty regimen that does the wonders?

Who am I not to try to look radiant when I see my young pretty girls looking radiant and happy to be at work. Thank you for the compliment. I think it is just being a woman. One thing I try to do is ensure that I do my spar and relax, especially when I am outside the country. That is when I have more time for myself. I also try not to bother over petty things, I don't let toxic things bring me

down, I don't even look at toxic things. Instead, I look at the beauty and strength of the character of people around me, people I work with and particularly family. Family is very important. We all give God the glory.

It was such an interesting interview, briefly, we will take your message for Nigerians abroad and even those at home.

Nigeria is our country and nobody will develop our country but ourselves. So whether you are a Nigerian in the diaspora or a Nigerian at home, let us work together to build this country. There are many challenges we are facing as a nation but we will overcome these challenges through us as a people. Whatever position you are, do your own bit in your little corner, let me do my own bit in my little corner. You don't even have to be in government. Ultimately it is our own country, Nigeria will always survive.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

By Khadija Shehu Bamalli

"Corruption takes many forms & infiltrates all institutions & economic sectors. We're tackling it head-on from the foreign relations front."

- Hon. Minister Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Geoffrey Onyeama

"We don't look at challenges, what we see in NiDCOM are opportunities, therefore, we make the most of it....."

- Chairman/CEO NIDCOM
Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa



I ENVISION A NIDCOM WITH ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT -BASSI

By Doosughun Abughidyer

Can we meet you sir?

I am Engr. Dr Sule Yakubu Bassi, the Secretary to the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM).

What can you tell us briefly about Nigerians in the Diaspora?

We have over 17 million Nigerians who live outside Nigeria. The definition of the Diaspora is anybody who sojourns outside the sovereign borders of Nigeria , if you travel to America , to Europe, Asia, Oceania, Middle East, to Africa, there is no place you will not find Nigerians, we have Nigerians out there doing good things they are the most educated, they are hardworking, they are very boisterous everywhere you find a Nigerian, he is doing his best , he will show you he /she is a Nigerian.

Knowing fully well that you are the Pioneer Secretary to the Commission, what has been your drive and motivation?

Before being appointed as the pioneer Secretary with the Commission, let me go back to history , when I finished my Ph.D Degree in the United Kingdom and lived there briefly before retuning back to Nigeria I had the privilege of doing a post doctoral certificate course in Israel, while I was in Israel, I under studied the Israeli Diaspora which is one of the oldest and foremost diaspora population in the World, in fact the word diaspora was coined specifically referring to Israelis who lived outside Israel and I saw the impact with which the Israeli Diaspora had on the Israeli economy and livelihood and way of life and from the understudy, when I came back having lived for four years plus in the United Kingdom, I felt the urge that the Nigerians in the Diaspora could complement the development of Nigeria in some areas they can also catalyse the development, because you see being out



there the Nigerians in the Diaspora has four things going for them, one they have resources, they have skills, they have talents and they have global exposure to global best practices, so these four things they can give back to the economy of Nigeria and complement development in some certain areas they are in the cutting edge of technology, so if they join hands with us, those of us that are here at home we can accelerate the rate of development for the Nation. This has been my motivation. I have served as the Director- General of the Directorate of Technical Corporation in Africa for two terms of eight years and while there, myself and several others had muted the idea of a one-stop agency for the Nigerians in the Diaspora and we join hands with others especially

Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, who was then the Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora to work on the bill to establish the Nigerians in the Diaspora Commission, I was part and parcel of that team who worked on developing that bill, we had the first reading, the second reading and the third reading of that bill over a period of 10 years in the National Assembly so I was pleasantly surprised when I was appointed by His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari to be the Pioneer Secretary of the Commission, being a pioneer comes with a lot of challenges, we are just starting from square zero. We had to develop the organogram for the Commission, we had to search for office space, we had to look for staff, we had to literally start from nothing but thank God with the kind of determination and a determined Chairman/CEO that we have Hon Abike Dabiri-Erewa we are able to move, it's now one and a half years we can look back with nostalgia to see the type of issues and challenges that we have had, it's still early days for the Commission, it's still early days for us to celebrate but one thing is sure, the Commission has taken off, we are engaging with Nigerians in the Diaspora globally to see how we can harness them to complement National Development.

Please can you share your experiences on how the Commission has been able to manage the running of the office with little or no budget?

The funding has really been paltry I must say but we are working with our two committees in the National Assembly, the House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora and also the Senate Committee on Diaspora and NGOS to see how the financial fortunes of this Commission can be improved. Moreso, as a baby, we are squatting here in Federal Secretariat, we don't have our own office building, we have to be in three different locations, it is not convenient and it is not efficient, we are also having to cut down on so many of the issues that we would have been working on especially now that we have a global mandate we need to organize our Diaspora in the continent, we need to have continental offices we haven't touched on that because we don't have the funds for that yet but definitely we need to set up focal point in all the continent so that we can harness our Diaspora resources. We have had a lot of goodwill from some few organizations like the European Union that helped us to develop the National Diaspora Policy and several other international agencies that when we have workshops and other things they

come in to support us, we also have a very dynamic Chairman/CEO who has been able to leverage the media and other organizations to assist us with the teething issues of taking off. We want to thank the Federal Government for also helping with the initial take off budget that we are implementing, so it has not been very easy but definitely we are making do with what we have. We are very prudent, we try to work efficiently with the little resources that we have so that at least it will not encumber our take off.

How has the inauguration of State Diaspora Focal Point Officers (SDFPO) help the commission engage with the Diasporas?

In Nigeria we run the state structure, we have 36 states and the FCT which is regarded as a state that is 37 every Diaspora of those 17million Nigerians in the Diaspora that I mentioned to you come from a state and Diaspora issues and engagement are much more facilitated when you deal with the Nigerians in the Diaspora to put something into their states. There is this relationship between the Diaspora and their States and Local Governments. when we came in, one of the structures we have developed over the past one and half years



is to write to all the States Governors because there is no state in Nigeria that doesn't have a Diaspora population outside, every state has indigenes in the Diaspora, some first, second or even third generations and each Nigerians has that strong bond and filiation with the state, what we did was to engage all the State Governors and the FCT Minister.

We wrote to them to set up a Diaspora Focal Point Office and to appoint a State Diaspora Focal Point Officer, as of today, 33 states and the FCT have a diaspora focal point officer and each one is relating directly with the Nigerians in the Diaspora from that state, telling them about the programmers of the state government, telling them where they can complement development in the state and let's not forget when you have any program or project and you want to domicile it in Nigeria you will need a piece of land as a domicile and by our laws, it is the State Governors that have the sovereign authority over land, Federal Government has over Abuja through the Federal capital territory administration , so if any Diaspora comes and he wants

to set up a project it's easier to deal with the state directly, for us at NIDCOM what we do twice a year we invite all the Diaspora focal point officers to a summit in which we discuss the current issues of the diaspora involvement in the development , we take reports from each state as to what their interaction with their diaspora is and we also share our own experiences as NIDCOM with the Diaspora and what the current issues are, their current thinking and ways to harness and encourage the Diaspora to participate in development here in Nigeria.

So the state diaspora focal point officers are a key structure for engaging with the diaspora , it might interest you to note that several of the state also have created a technology communication platform with their Diaspora. They communicate twice a week or once a week and tell them what is happening in their states and where they can complement. Some states have their diaspora indigenes coming on medical missions , some have come to set up schools. In Delta state as of today, the Delta state Diaspora are working

on setting up a Diaspora university of technology , in Enugu state, I know some Diaspora have set up a hospital, here in the FCT we have some Diaspora hospitals, there are specialise clinics, in Kano state and I think in Enugu state, the State Governments have set up Diaspora housing programs, in Kano, any kano diaspora that shows up and wants to build a house the Governor has promised free land for that Diaspora, in Enugu there is Diaspora housing estate almost 300 hectares that our diasporas are benefiting , and I think several other states are also creating diaspora housing programs aside the National Diaspora Mortgage Program that is being developed by Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria Diverting the diaspora mandate to the state is one of the best strategies for getting the Nigerians in the diaspora to engage with development in Nigeria, just few months back, a diaspora who plays football in the premier league in France came home to Benue state to his local government and sank three industrial boreholes that are producing water for the people, the joy of the people knows no end and everybody is drinking clean water courtesy of Mr. Simon Moses, there are others doing one or two things , building factories , investing in agriculture, it is still early days but we are encouraging them, one of our diaspora fellow from America has set up a company that has trained over two million Nigerians in ICT, that is the kind of intervention we are looking at.

Where do you see NIDCOM in the next 10 years?

My vision for NIDCOM in the next 10 years is for it to have its own office building which I am christening Diaspora Plaza. It will be a one-stop shop for any Diaspora anywhere in the world to relate with Nigeria, I am envisioning NIDCOM having its own radio station and a television station that it will link up with the Nigerians in Diaspora and keep them updated of development here in Nigeria and beyond. I am envisioning NIDCOM that would have created an authentic data base of Nigerians in the Diaspora. One of the issues that we are battling is that we don't seem to have authentic figures of Nigerians in the Diaspora, we are working on it, we are doing diaspora mapping , and classifying them into sectors and professions. These are the kind of issues that can help us plan, that can help us challenge our Diaspora to engage in the development of our country.

I am envisioning a NIDCOM where the brain drain that were complaining of will become brain gain and also become brain circulation , where our people going to



the Diaspora would not be lamenting that we are missing them or losing our talents but we are seeing them also as people that are bringing back, that are not just only going out but are coming in either directly or physically or through technology transfer, through assisting, accelerating development of Nigeria, that is, the kind of vision I have for NIDCOM, I am seeing a global village which the world has come into with Nigerians and Nigerians in the Diaspora being major players and bringing in the economic benefits of their being out there also bringing technical benefits , so that at the end, we will have accelerated development of our country and economy, that is the kind of vision I have for NIDCOM.

Do you have any word for Nigerians both at home and in the Diaspora?

This has been a very depressing year with the corona virus pandemic which is still around and about, what I have for Nigerians both at home and abroad is to keep hope alive to stay safe to look forward a brighter future the worst is behind us , especially as the year has come to an end I want Nigerians to look forward to a prosperous new year.

HOW NIDCOM RELATES WITH NIGERIANS ABROAD - BALOGUN

Sir, please may we know you?

Thank you very much, the NiDCOM media team. My name is Abdur-Rahman Balogun, I am the Head of Media, Public Relations and Protocol Unit, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission.

How does NiDCOM manages media relations with other news agencies?

We have collaboration, partnership and we are equally using our goodwill with other news agencies. Looking at the list of some of the agencies we have close to 220 that we have a relationship with. How do we link up with them? We have so many outlets like our social media outlets, we have created a WhatsApp group for all these media agencies.

Once we have a press statement or press release or any issue to discuss we post it there. So we are in close contact, equally we have a group email and all of the media agencies are added to the email list.

We exchange our stories with them. We equally have a website www.nidcom.gov.ng they can hook on to, to get our stories and other activities of the commission.

We have so many other social media handles of course our Twitter handle, Facebook handle, Telegram and Instagram handle are there. We have so many other avenues that we reach out to them and from time to time we still do invite them to come over for one on one interactive interview or plenary session that we arrange with the Chairman/ CEO of Nigerians in Diaspora Commission in person of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa. So we are good with them, we have understanding, we have goodwill and we have a very robust relationship with our media agencies.



How has social media facilitated information management on Nigerians in the diaspora?

Yes, if it is a general question, social media is really facilitating it. Our chairman CEO being a journalist herself, she is one of the top government functionaries that is very loud on social media by projecting the activities of government and that of the commission. At times, before we issue a statement on any matter, the issue is already broadcasted on our social media handle and some other personal handles but it has become a source of news outlet.

You will recall that in 2020, the news broke that some Nigerian students in Katsina in Kankara that were kidnapped have been released and this news was attributed to our Chairman being the source of the news. Well she said though "I am open on social media but this particular one my social media handle was cloned, I am not the one speaking here, though they put my picture there this is not me". So she had to change her password and report to Twitter. The point I am making in essence is that we are very very

open, we have a face on social media, so social media has been playing that role effectively for dissemination of information.

As the Head of Media, Public Relations and Protocol Unit, what future plans do you have for the Unit and the Commission, in terms of developing formidable writers/journalists.

Yes future plans so many plans that we have highlighted, of course we have instituted a weekly debriefing a kind of interactive session among ourselves. We share ideas together, we interact, we review activities in the past one week, we project into what the next week will be. We have a diary of events ,where events are slated and we give an idea of what is going to be. So we've been doing this to energize and sensitise ourselves so that we know the nuances of our modern day reportage of events. We are on top of our stories, once in a while we bring in some experts online that will discuss some of their writings on how to improve in our projection. Also we

have it in line that some professional bodies, because some of my staff here don't have journalistic background, so for you to work in the media unit you have to belong to certain professional bodies such as Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigerian Guild of Editors and so on and so forth.

At least out of these three you just have to belong to one or two or three to be able to be relevant in the industry.

So my future plan is to get as many as possible of the NiDCOM staff in the media unit to be enlisted in these professional bodies, it will enhance their performance, it will also enhance their status. Not only that we want some of them to pursue their academic degrees, we have some of them who may want to go for their post graduate in relevant fields.

We shall encourage them because we see it as part of the training to enhance their knowledge and sharpen their skills vis-à-vis how to go about reporting events. We equally have training both in-house and general training that are being proposed, this is being handled by the Admin department of the commission. We had one or two major one in 2020 for all staff, we hope in 2021 we will not be confronted with paucity of funds,

in 2021 we will have as many as possible training. This will equally enhance the performance of the media unit.

So we have a lot of plans in terms of capacity building, in terms of welfare for the staff in general but specifically for staff deployed to the media and public relations unit of NiDCOM.

Do you have any message for Nigerians at home and in the diaspora?

Well our major task here is to project the image of Nigeria in the diaspora and to project the image of Nigerians living in the diaspora back home. So my message to Nigerians in the diaspora in which this commission was set up is;

- They should be a good Nigerian
- They should project the good image of Nigeria
- They should continue to be successful in whatever endeavors they are in
- They should be a patriotic and true ambassador of Nigeria
- They should avoid trouble and avoid criminality .

They should see to how they can excel in whatever profession they have chosen and in return the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission has made it upon itself a committee, in which I am the convener of that committee to work out the modalities of identifying six hundred Nigerian icons in the diaspora who have

been doing great things. It is time for us to honor this people, it is time for us to celebrate them, it is time for us to identify them, it is time for us to relate with them. This has not been done in the history of this country before, we now want to do it. So we are having a compendium of six hundred Nigerians at sixty it is going to be part and parcel of the activities marking the 60th anniversary of our great country.

So my advice to them is that they should continue to be good, they should continue to be patriotic, they should continue to be true ambassadors of the country wherever they find themselves and on the other hand they should shun bad ways, they should make sure that they project the name of Nigeria and they should not join some bad gangs that will lock them into any form of criminality which will soil the good name of our great country Nigeria.

TOUR NIGERIA

By Khadija Shehu Bamalli

In this edition, I'll take you through the ancient city of Kano. A state in Northern Nigeria, endowed with so many historical yet interesting sites.



Another interesting site to behold is the Kofar Mata dye pits. Did you know that the local dye pits at Kofar Mata have been used for over 500 years?

photo source: asirimagazine.com



I'm so excited to share with you the mysterious rock called 'Dutsen Amare'. The rock is believed to be a depository of humans and embodiment of history which consists of nine clusters of different rock formations.

photo source: messagearewa.com



The next is the Dala hill: It stands at a majestic 534-meter height. You can't afford to miss the appealing journey up the hill, where lies the mysterious well called 'Rijiyar Kare Kukan Ka'. This means 'The well where you'll cry out your tears till they finish'. It is believed that if a stone is thrown down into the well, it would take about twenty minutes to reach the water.

photo source: Oldnaja.com

- Other locations include:
- Gidan Makama (Museum)
 - Gidan dan Hausa
 - Kano zoological garden
 - Tiga Dam
 - Kano city gates
 - Emir's Palace



RETIRED COMMANDANT CALLS FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN NiDCOM AND ARMED FORCES ON DIASPORA AFFAIRS

By Deborah Anaelechi

AVM Sunday Ali Leks (Rtd.), a former Commandant of the Nigerian Armed Force Command and Staff College, Jaji, has called for a liaison between the Armed Forces and the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), to manage the welfare of the country's military personnel during peace-keeping missions and training programmes, abroad.

He stated this when he paid a courtesy visit to NiDCOM headquarters in Abuja.

AVM Ali explained that the collaboration will be useful as the Armed Forces regularly send some of their staff to undergo training, outside the country.

He suggested that NiDCOM, prior to such duties, could interact, through introducing and educating participants to likely Diaspora-Community Leadership in the host countries they are posted to.

Ali maintained that this effort if implemented, will help members of the Armed Forces, especially retired officers, to cooperate with Nigerians in those countries, to engage in gainful



and legitimate businesses, which will be in furtherance to the nation's development.

The retired officer, who was a Helicopter Gunship Pilot, lauded President Muhammadu Buhari for establishing the Commission under the leadership of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa and her team.

He said that he had followed up from the early conception of NiDCOM and expressed how gratifying that Nigerians abroad can boast of a Commission that is ever ready to attend to their needs and concerns, as well as carry them along

as stakeholders of the country's growth.

The Army Veteran attested to the fact that Nigerians home and abroad are a group of excellent individuals and urged all to think 'Nigeria' and strategise in order to move the country forward.

Receiving him on behalf of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Chairman/CEO, NiDCOM, Engr. Dr. Sule Yakubu Bassi, the Secretary to the Commission, appreciated the kind words of the Former Commandant, reiterating that Nigerians, especially the Nigerian Diaspora are trail blazers in every sector they find themselves.

FOOD CORNER

● By Doosughun Abughidyer

Our today's dish is Margi Special. It's a delicacy Mostly eaten by the people of Maiduguri and Adamawa States in Nigeria. This delicacy is easy to make because the ingredients are not difficult to find. If you are in the diaspora and are tired of regular meals, you should try this.

RECIPE

- i. Yakuwa Leaf (Roselle)
- ii. African Spinach (Green)
- iii. Fresh Tomatoes
- iv. Onions
- v. Fresh Pepper
- vi. Salt
- vii. Seasoning Cube
- viii. Fresh Fish (cat fish)
- ix. Grounded Potash
- x. Vegetable Oil

Preparation

1. Pick both the Yakuwa leaf and African Spinach leaf, wash and then slice them separately in moderate sizes.
2. To prepare the fish, cut in medium size, wash it and add into a sauce pan, add seasoning cube and salt to taste, add the sliced fresh pepper, and slice onion.
3. Wash the tomatoes, slice it and add it into the pan, add the well sliced leaves, add the vegetable oil, add the potash and 1/2 cup of water.



Margi

● Photo Credit: Cookpad.com

4. Set the heat on low.
5. Place the pan on the heat, allow to cook for 30 minutes till the water is almost dry, taste to know if the seasonings are okay as desired but if not, then add more to get the desired taste, and allow to cool for a while and food is ready. N.B Do not stir in order not to dissolve the cat fish.

Serve With Any Swallow Of Your Choice.

Enjoy!!!!

INT'L MIGRANTS DAY 2020: GROUP HONOURS NiDCOM

● By Deborah Anaelechi

The Explore Potentials Initiative (EPI), a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), in line with the International Migrants Day celebration, presented an Award to Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the Chairman/CEO, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), for the Migration Management, Leadership and Entrepreneurial Spirit.

According to the NGO Director/Founder, Mr Chigozie Cyril, who was a former irregular migrant, the award is to celebrate individuals and organisations from the private and public sector, that have contributed their quota in one way or the other, for an improved migration management system, especially in Nigeria.

Receiving the award on her behalf, Dr. Sule Yakubu Bassi, the Secretary to the Commission, thanked the EPI delegation for the kind gesture.

Bassi lauded the team for their drive in sensitising and lending their voice to eradicating irregular migration in the country.

He agreed that Nigeria is a land of opportunities for those who strive to make good names for themselves, rather secure funds and travel irregularly in search for greener pastures and land in the wrong hands over there.

The NiDCOM scribe stressed that the Commission is all about harnessing the human resources in the Diaspora, in terms of intellects, drive and talents for a national development, but is willing to assist the citizens, whether regular or irregular migrant, if possible, against any issue or inhumane treatment towards them.

Bassi advised that the NGO, being a young one, should

liaise with other organisations that share similar interests in migration and diaspora affairs.

The Explore Potentials Initiative (EPI) is a non-profitable group borne out of necessity from the unfortunate but inspiring experiences of the Director/Founder, Mr Chigozie Cyril, who was once an irregular migrant at Tripoli, Libya.

In 2017, while he was in Tripoli, he launched the NGO, geared towards sensitising youths especially to find alternative means of empowering themselves back home, rather than waste their time, energy, resources and even their lives, while migrating irregularly, in the quest for better opportunities abroad.



NIGERIAN DIASPORA ARE PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT - Hon. TERAB

By Deborah Anaelechi

For record purposes Sir, please may we know you?

Thank you very much. My name is Abdul-Rahman Terab. I am currently the Head of Department, Technology Transfer and Innovation Department of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission.

Thank you. Sir, the Commission is set to have its Contact Centre. How essential or efficient will this be for an effective service delivery?

The contact centre is the bridge between the Commission and members in the Diaspora. It is very essential because members of the Diaspora need to speak with NiDCOM. NiDCOM needs to hear from them and provide every feedback that they may require. NiDCOM is the only Government agency that interface with them by its establishment, statutorily. So for that reason, it is going to be effective in ensuring that Nigerians in the Diaspora relate with the country. We are actually the gateway. That opportunity needs to be provided and that is what the Commission is doing.

The contact centre is expected to have what we call the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) which the service providers or the operator will be able to provide instantly for such questions asked. We also have a second category of questions which will need to be escalated. We will try, as much as possible, for feedback to be made available to those seeking such clarifications, or answers for their questions.

So, it is actually going to be an addition of the services the Commission is already rendering; in the sense that, this time around, Nigerians anywhere in the world can pick up the number or the contact phone numbers and contact the Commission. So, that they don't have to wait.



This will greatly reduce the work on protocol where you can have direct access to the Commission. I think it is very important because we have a lot of distress situations; we have a lot of misinformation, and as a matter of fact, we have a lot of ignorance out there [on what we do] and people need to be informed; people need to get the right and adequate information of the Commission.

Previously, we have had a lot of innovative platforms (like the Abike AI app, and the rest of them). So, how essential, or in terms of comparison, how has it been for day-to-day Technological Operations in the Commission?

Yes, what is important is to integrate the available platforms. But what is even more important is to use the first part of 2021 in order to create sensitisation programmes, that will effectively inform members of the Diaspora, that these are available platforms through which you can reach the Commission. This is just for the ability of members of the Diaspora to communicate with the Commission, seek for clarification and get feed backs. Beyond that, about various other platforms are being created even as we speak in the Commission, for some select countries and some select regions, where Nigerians can go online and register as members of the Diaspora.

Now, that in itself is also going to create reasons for people to seek clarifications and it is these integrated platforms- the call centre and the application, like the Artificial Intelligence, which you spoke about, which we intend to put together to provide feed backs for Nigerians, who will seek clarifications, in the Diaspora.

With the AI, most people fear that it will cut short human interaction and everything. Especially now, with the second wave of the Corona virus, how helpful has it been?

It's beyond-, let's forget about the COVID-19, because the COVID-19 has its own pressure on the AI itself. Before the idea of COVID 19, we have 17 million Nigerians, officially on the data, in the Diaspora. You and I know that realistically, they are much more than that.

But let's leave it at 17 million. If you are creating a system, you should be able to project the possibility of all the 17 million calling at once. It will require you to have 17 million people to respond to them. I am just trying to give you the scenario for you to understand that no amount of call centre or operators that we are going to have will be able to respond to these 17 million Nigerians, as adequately and as effectively, as we require.

We must seek the support of technology and of course, in this regard, Artificial Intelligence. To be able to create that platform- just imagine, for example, if 17 million Nigerians, all, called at once. Can you be able to have the kind of capacity to respond to them? (No).

Even if your answer is no, then you should try as much as possible to get to somewhere, that is understandable that you have done your best. And that is the reason we believe, the AI, currently in place, is not only important but also needs to be expanded going forward: its capacities, its capabilities.

We are trying to upgrade its capacity to respond to second-level feed backs, such that, we will like it to continue to see our responses; such that it has the ability to develop itself, artificially. You understand what I am saying? Creating a wide database of memory on the kind of responses, requisitions or requests that are put on the platforms. So that eventually, it can have the capacity to act like any of our best staff in the Commission.

It will take time but obviously we intend to get there and that is when you will think that we have done enough to the extent that we can be able to say, we have an effective platform for Nigerians in the Diaspora.

Wow, interesting. Nigeria, and indeed, the Commission is really keying into the "going-digital" bandwagon. Okay and finally, Sir... as the Head of the TTI Department, what future plans do you have for the Unit and the Commission, in terms of innovation and technology?

Of course, basically data! The department is mainly wide. It covers a lot of areas with regards to investments, remittances, housing (diaspora housing) and technology transfer and innovation activities, across the world that involves Nigerians in the Diaspora, as well as, managing the Commission's IT infrastructure.

So you can see how vast it is and in so many ways, we are trying to ensure that we make the best of these responsibilities of the department. In the area of remittances, we have already recorded a success. We pushed from this department the need for remittances to be paid in Dollar, or in the currency in which they are sent.

but we raised it again after this policy was implemented some weeks ago with the CBN Governor, because our major concern, actually, even beyond, and that is in the people who are receiving remittances should be receiving money in the currencies the remittances are sent.

It is the need to reduce the cost of remittances. The cost of remittances across the world is an average of about 3-6 per cent. Actually, the global average that is being pushed by the global financial communities, led by the World Bank, is to achieve 3 per cent



or less, and that is the cost for sending remittances. The example of that is if you send \$100, I shouldn't be charged more than \$3. Now, the current reality in Nigeria is that we pay between 9-12 per cent, which is the highest in the world. So for every one dollar you are expected to pay about 9-12 dollars. You can see that affects how much is being remitted. It affects the enthusiasm and it makes people to think twice to use official channels.

Now, there is a problem- if you don't use official channels in sending remittances to the country, the country is not going to benefit from the balance of payment that needs to pump into the country. The money that comes in as remittances are private monies; so the government you might say, may not benefit in terms of receiving it as a revenue.

But what the government stands to benefit; some of the few taxes that come with it. But most importantly, the balance of payment which has the capacity; which is very important in determining the value of the Naira in the international market. Therefore, the more dollars you send through official channels, the higher the value of the Naira, because for every Dollar you send, they buy Naira with it. So that is the idea.

In terms of investment, as we speak with you, the Commission has already successfully hosted three Investment Summits; the third one last November. But we have also taken into a lot of other initiatives: one, which is the Diaspora Investment Trust Fund. The report of the Establishment Committee was just presented to the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs.

A lot of it was also done in collaboration with other development partners: the World Bank, International Organisations and the rest, so as to give a platform for Nigerians in Diaspora to have an investment warehouse, here in Nigeria. They can decide on what kind of diaspora investment they get into. It is huge; very huge! Some of us project that if this goes successfully, it might become the second or third largest investment hedge funds in the world. That's actually our expectation.

And then, the Diaspora housing. We are working with the Federal Mortgage Bank, which has already given us the assurance. In fact, we have discussed. We have worked on the concept paper, the document itself together. We have put all our input on it, and we are going to flaunt it any moment. Which means Nigerians in Diaspora are going to get

mortgages from the Federal Mortgage Bank, to build houses or to own houses in Nigeria. That is a very fundamental aspect of it, because out of the \$25 billion remittances that comes into the country, annually, we have projected that about 20% of that, which is about \$5 billion, actually goes into housing.

That is even with a lot of disadvantages that has to do with the security of the fund-issues of fraudulent activities, and even in situations where what they sent for or paid for, is not what they get. Now in this case, they are not paying anything; all they need to do is to be a contributor to the Federal Mortgage Bank, and they will be given the opportunity of about 70 years to own a house and pay within that period. That we believe is a very important feat for development in the diaspora housing sector. We are establishing the Diaspora housing fair, hopefully sometime in March 2021, that is to create synergy on all housing service providers and members of the Diaspora, who intend to be off-takers or service providers in the housing sector. We want to bring everybody together under one roof: those that want to sell or build houses for the Diaspora.

The idea is to create an organised system, not the type that anyone can just go anywhere and choose, no.

We have scrutinised these people of their credentials and we believe we can present them to members of the Diaspora. And for the members of the Diaspora, we can assure you that these groups have some background in this sectors. We are not saying that we are giving them the guarantee but we can now at least certify that those people are into the industry, and they have provided such services and have what it takes to engage with the Diaspora.

With regards to the technology transfer and innovation, Dr. Okejie, one of the NASA Scientists, in fact the first black NASA scientist to be celebrated in the world. He recently declared his intention to come to Nigeria to establish a solar power plant, manufacturing, not Assembly, because he believes that the country has the basic raw materials to do that. That is only one, if that succeeds because we believe the potential to establish that alone, one of the largest and industrious for the future market of energy in the world cannot be over-emphasised; in fact cannot be created even as we speak, because it might even get to not just Nigerians alone but it might affect other neighbouring countries, and other countries in the other West African sub-region and beyond.

What is again important is that we have those who have what it takes to transfer their knowledge, skills and innovation to this country. The Commission has to prepare that ground; seek and look out for these kinds of people in the Diaspora, who have such capacities and see how to transfer those knowledge and innovation into the country. We believe we have everything there. We believe that most Nigerians, very willing, that is the ones that are abroad, to come and teach, transfer, whatever kind of mechanism you want them to share.

You want them to come and establish here. Another is to establish a group of Nigerians here whether as venture capitalists, investors, students, the workforce...you understand? Any kind of service provider who will like to collaborate with the Diasporas. Interestingly, we have state diaspora focal persons in every state, which is run by the State Government, at the sub-national level. We believe that any kind of project going to take place from the Diaspora has to be located in the particular state for collaboration, and that collaboration is key to that.

And so that's, by and large, we are the technological backbone of the Commission, we will like to

see everyone in the Commission get to have his or her own technological protege. So that everybody has an avatar, and of course, the Commission can live life on virtual. As you can see the Commission, I am so proud to say that I cannot finish this interview without mentioning the commitment, zeal and passion of the honourable Chairman of the Commission, Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, who has given the opportunity to contribute not only for the development of the Commission, but of the country.

She is someone who is always after results, and she is not stopping at that. It tells you that every member of the Commission works every 24 hours. There is no time there won't be something for you to do. There is no time that you are not willing to respond to any kind of issue, that comes up. Nigerians are spread across the 24 time-zone; so it means our work is 24 hours. We should be able to devise a means, if it is not humanly possible to be in shifts where your Avatar, will be able to treat issues that are raised while you sleep, in the same



manner, you will respond to issues when you are awake. treat issues that are raised while you sleep, in the same manner, you will respond to issues when you are awake.

Finally, any message for the Diasporas and Nigerians, as a whole?

Just as we call the Chairman of the Commission, "Mama Diaspora" (laughs). And that tells you what kind of personality she has brought to bear in the Diaspora issues in Nigeria. She is someone who is willing to listen at all times. When you call someone a mother, it means she has no reservations, when it comes to what you might call her "kids" and at any time, when any issue come up, she will be willing to respond to it.

I think that spirit alone is what captivates the entire Commission. It is interesting to know that this

Commission is just a year. Most people will think it has been here for a very long time. Of course because it metamorphosed from the committees from the House of Representatives to the President and to what it is as a Commission. The Commission if just a year; it has less than 120 staff or thereabout, but the Commission is performing what organisations with a thousand staff or more are doing at a highly-competitive level. This is the spirit in which the Commission has come to bare. It is established to provide services to members of the Diaspora. I will like to call on members of the Diaspora to take advantage of this very important initiative and opportunity.

So for me, I think there is no better time for the Diaspora in the history of Nigeria like now. The Diaspora

is now a VIP (Very Important Personality) and of course, a VIC (Very Important Citizen) of Nigeria. I am happy because in the past when people are living outside the country, people connote that with negative narrative: "Oh, the person ran away to another country!", "Oh, the person ran to obodo oyibo (white man's land)". We have never seen it from the perspective of a viable human capital that will contribute immensely to the development of the country. The establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission is set to achieving that. It is changing the narrative; telling everybody that look, "the Diaspora is not just your brother but it is that big brother you need to help in making us the best of our imaginations". I think that is my message for the Diaspora.

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