

DEVELOPMENT AND SYNCHRONIZATION OF DIASPORA DATABASE AT THE SUB-NATIONAL LEVELS WITH NIDCOM FOR EFFECTIVE MOBILIZATION AND INTEGRATION OF NIGERIANS IN THE DIASPORA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

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TO THE THIRD SUMMIT OF THE STATE DIASPORA FOCAL POINT OFFICERS (SDFPOS). HELD AT THE SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS, ABUJA. 20TH MAY 2021.

PROTOCOL.

It is an honor and a privilege to stand before you this morning to discuss the need for the development and integration of a credible and reliable database for Nigerians who are in the Diaspora. This is pertinent under this auspice of a collaborative platform between National and Sub-National governments towards integrating the diaspora in our national development. The offices of the State Diaspora Focal Point officers will definitely play a vital role in the fulfillment of this important and necessary component of the mandate of the Commission for the integration of our Diaspora and the development of our great nation.

The main essence of developing a database for the diaspora in Nigeria is for the active pursuance of the mandate of the commission as enshrined in the 2017 NIDCOM establishment act, which is to provide for the engagement of Nigerians in the Diaspora in the policies, projects and programmes of the Nigerian Governments at all levels, and for their participation in the development of Nigeria for the purpose of utilizing the human capital and material resources

of Nigerians in the Diaspora towards the overall socio-economic, cultural and political development of Nigeria and for related matters.

In this regard, there is the need to build a realistic profile of the approximately 17 million Nigerians who are in the Diaspora. We all hear that we have about 17 million Nigerians out there. But how can we be able to identify them and engage with them effectively, if we can't know their names, their faces, their locations, their professions and their identities. It is imperative for us to match every figure of these 17 million Nigerians who are in the Diaspora with a face, a name, and an identity. Thus, the need to develop a credible and a reliable yet effective database cannot be overemphasised, especially as we are about to commence the effective implementation of the brand-new Nigeria Diaspora Policy.

In the about two years of the existence of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), the first thing we did in our 2020 projects, was to commence with the establishment of data mapping sites which will serve as the initial capturing platform for Data in over ten countries around the world at the moment. These data mapping sites are currently available and active as can be accessed through our website on www.nidcom.gov.ng/registry.

On lighter note, the NIDCOM website was recently adjudged the top 3 Nigerian Government Websites, in terms of content, consistency and reliability by a recent study of Nigerian Government Websites.

The data mapping sites, while already available and accessible to the general public, will be commissioned in a month's time to create the necessary awareness and develop a collaborative agenda for the development of a credible Database for the Nigerians in the Diaspora.

We are also adding 10 more additional countries in 2021, bringing the Total to about 20 countries hopefully by the beginning of 2022.

We are also experimenting on some High-Tech Artificial Intelligence solutions, through some Data Analytics procedures that are intended towards identifying and bringing us closer to Nigerians living in the Diaspora. This is aimed at

developing a platform for the commission to get closer and interface with our Diaspora in order to obtain credible and reliable data.

These data capture sites are intended to obtain basic raw data which will eventually be put through a credible screening process in order to ensure the authenticity of the data and avoid duplication of our data items.

This is the primary stage being established in developing our database which can be quite challenging. Obtaining data generally has its challenges with regards to accessibility, credibility, reliability, functionality, safety and usability of the data obtained. The later part which are functionality, safety and usability do also come with additional baggage of the legality or otherwise of data protection and administration depending on the clime and environment where these data will be obtained and put to use.

Furthermore, obtaining data from Nigerians especially, also has its own additional challenges. These include trust of the Nigerians in the Diaspora in the purpose, usage and safety of their Data when provided. Such concerns are not only very obvious due to the negative image of the country being peddled out there, but also as a result of some poor experiences of some of us who have suffered from each other as a people. Many of the concerns deserve the necessary attention as a government and also need to be addressed going forward in order to make the process of obtaining data of Nigerians in the Diaspora less cumbersome.

One basic way the commission is using to overcome these challenges is by engaging the Diaspora and the rest of the world through persistent advocacy in order to correct the narrative and make Nigerians more comfortable to share their respective personal data. Others include the long-term effect of gathering such data which is also for the personal benefit of the Diaspora as we shall see later.

May I at this juncture implore the State Diaspora Focal Point Offices and Officers in the various states of the federation to key into this initiative and consider the development of Diaspora Database as a priority in achieving the mandate set before us. While our Data mapping sites are also open to state offices to help

populate the site with genuine and credible data, we are as well open to processing any form of physical, raw or digital data that may be provided by the states and the Sub-National Entities, as well as the Standing Committee on Diaspora Matters for the benefit of all, in the fulfilment of this important mandate. In the same vein, we would also like to encourage the state offices through the State Diaspora Focal Point Officers (SDFPOs) to help with the effort of advocacy to their numerous and respective indigenes around the world in the diaspora. This is necessary at this crucial stage to enlighten the diaspora on the new database being developed for the country at large, in order to develop the required trust among our people in the Diaspora, and in line with fulfilling the mandate of the new Nigeria Diaspora Policy. Other reasons include the need to create a platform for the country to engage with the diaspora for the overall development of the Diaspora, the Government and their kith and kin here in Nigeria.

We are also developing a template for formal integration of Data between NIDCOM and the state offices in order to create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on how the various State Diaspora Focal Point Officers (SDFPOs) can develop their own database and also be able to synchronize with our main database here at NiDCOM.

If you have data at your disposal, we expect you to share it with us in order to create a unified database that have the required credibility and integrity that a data of that nature deserves.

Consequently, we would like to urge you to pursue the development of the database as a main priority so as to raise the necessary awareness and interest through persistent advocacy for the benefit of all.

While it is important to note that the benefits for the development of the Diaspora database in line with the mandate of the new Diaspora Policy and experiences from other successful climes are enormous, the benefits specifically for the Nigerian Diaspora include the following:

1. Diaspora voting which may soon be achieved.
2. Diaspora Mortgages for Housing which is currently with the FMBN.

3. Incentives for investments such as the Nigeria Diaspora Investment Trust Fund and The Diaspora Bonds.
4. Land and Property allocations.
5. Political and community appointments and recognitions like 600 diaspora magazines.
7. Interventions and Credit loans for Agriculture and Solid Minerals Development through the CBN and BOI initiative etc.

In view of this, It is equally important to buttress that for those who are sceptical of Nigeria's capacity to develop and manage data effectively, we have encouraging examples from the development and management of the Bank Verification Number (otherwise known as the BVN) by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the National Identity Number by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC).

As a matter of fact, the Nigeria Inter-Bank Settlement System Plc (NIBSS), is a global success story and one of the world's first in data management and digital/ Automated transaction processing among banks and their respective customers Online. That is why the ease with which you can Bank online in the comfort of your home in Nigeria, including digital customer service, is still alien to many advanced climes across the world despite the lockdowns experienced due the Corona Virus Pandemic currently.

As such, Nigeria has made giant strides in ensuring safety and integrity of Data obtained for public use over the years.

Therefore, it is crucial for the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), the Standing Committee on Diaspora Matters, and the State Focal Point Officers (SDFPOs) to collaborate in achieving the desired objectives of obtaining the required database of Nigerians in the Diaspora in order to effectively pursue and fulfil the mandate of the new National Diaspora Policy.

Consequently, this calls for the need to develop Capacity and support across all stakeholders in this project in order to achieve this critical component of Diaspora engagement and to fulfil the mandate the new Diaspora Policy.

May I therefore equally seize this opportunity to request for further assistance from the Government and our various development partners, specifically the IOM, the European Union and World Bank to come to our aid in developing capacity, reaching out to our Diaspora, Advocacy, and in creating access to new technologies which can be used to access credible and reliable database for the Nigerians in Diaspora at the NiDCOM Headquarters and the various state Focal Point Offices across the federation.

In conclusion, it has been clear that Diaspora Database is a critical element for mobilising and integrating the Nigerian Diaspora for national development in line with the intent, purpose and vision for the establishment of NIDCOM in the first instance, and the approval of the National Diaspora Policy thereafter.

While we at NIDCOM have commenced the development and processing of various data mapping platforms, the need for stakeholder collaboration at both the National and Sub-National Governments, including the State Diaspora Focal Point Officers (SDFPOs) and the Standing Committee on Diaspora Matters cannot be overemphasised.

We are optimistic though, on our part and confident that the efforts being put in place by the Commission under the able leadership of the indefatigable Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of NIDCOM, The Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa and ably supported by the Erudite Secretary to the Commission, Engr. Dr. Sule Yakubu Bassi, we will develop and effectively achieve a credible and reliable database for the benefit of our Diaspora and the country at large.

Thank you very much for listening.

God bless you and God bless Our Diaspora and the Federal Republic of Nigeria.