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Towards Reducing the Inequality Gap in Nigeria

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INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA



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Foreword

Like French Economist Thomas Piketty puts it in his seminal book, *Capital in 21st Century*, the biggest problem the world faces is inequality and it is the huge fundamental to the instability in the world.

Data as revealed by Piketty, showed that the rate (r) of return of wealth (the haves) has exceeded the growth (g) of economic output as measured through income. This equation ($r > g$) means a lot and simply tells us that wealth at the rich is moving faster than income from economic output.

This rate of return of wealth does not come through honest work only. It is a abuse of opportunities in the society, unfair access to information, illicit capital flows, taxes evasion and also outright theft of public resources that widen this gap in developing society such as Nigeria. This is how we put the society at risk.

Across my estate is a large slum, I keep feeling uneasy about their conditions. Once in a while I walk in to buy bottled water, I see the energy and the commerce. In that dirty enclave, young people at times lay thin strips of cardboards sleeping under open sky. Someday, the Lagos State Government will find their abode inconvenient and chase them away.

The society we live strives to make the poor invisible and through unjust action, this keeps the cycle of wealth small, obeying what sociologists call the "Matthew Effect". Anthony Atkinson's book on *Inequality* is also a good explainer on this important issue if the graph of Piketty are so scary. It is a thematic area that offers a lot of insight on the imbalances of the world we are today.

OXFAM is working with BudgIT in driving issues of inequality in Nigeria and exploring angles of corruption, poor governance and how expands the gaps between the rich and the poor.



TOWARDS REDUCING THE INEQUALITY GAP IN NIGERIA



#Evenitup

TOWARDS REDUCING THE INEQUALITY GAP IN NIGERIA

by Olapeju Olasunkanmi.

6.5%

it is evident that while 6.5% of men in the labour force were unemployed, and 13.9 percent, underemployed, 8.9 percent of women in the labour force were unemployed and 19.6 percent, underemployed.

This past decades, the Nigerian economy has experienced unprecedented growth. From the low 2.8% growth rate and a GDP of 74 billion dollars in 1999, the economy soared by leaps and bounds as a result of improved crude oil sales, and the success stories in the telecommunication and services industries, following the liberalisation of the economy. As at the last quarter of 2014, the economy grew at 7%, with GDP reaching 574 billion dollars. Nigeria became the largest economy in Africa, and the 21st in the world, in nominal terms. While the reality of the growth must be admitted, it lacks inclusiveness. Nigeria is a paradox: a better economy does not equate a financially buoyant people. Increase in resources has further deepened the challenge of fair distribution.

Nigeria still performs poorly says the new World Bank relative poverty estimate, which is 33.1 percent. This represents a drastic but surprising improvement from the more popular previous estimate of 60 percent. This new figure, still locates Nigeria below the poverty line. It reminds one that Nigeria remains one of the most unequal countries—with the inequality spanning social, economic, political, and cultural—in the world.

From the National Bureau of Statistics data for the first quarter of 2015, it is evident that while 6.5% of men in the labour force were unemployed, and 13.9 percent, underemployed, 8.9 percent of women in the labour force were unemployed and 19.6 percent, underemployed. Another UNESCO report, quoting from the NBS, reveals that Nigeria's adult literacy spectrum runs variably across states (Lagos 92% and Borno 14.5%), regions (urban 74.6% and

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Nigeria currently allocates about 30 billion dollars as total expenditure, and runs a deficit budget for its 170 million population.



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Education is important. Girl-child literacy should be improved by providing opportunities for the over 10 million out-of-school children through access to quality public education.

rural 48.7%), and gender (male 65.1 and female 48.6%). However, most studies on inequality agree that all dimensions of inequality are skewed against the poor. The poor are the most vulnerable of Nigeria's multifaceted socio-economic challenges. The insurgence crisis in the north affords a learning curve as it shows the connection between poverty and vulnerability. Daily, unemployed youths are recruited into terrorist groups with promises of money.

It is therefore expedient that in addressing inequality of whatever thematic expression, there has to be a systematic approach to poverty alleviation. Corruption is a bane towards equality, and should be fought to a standstill. Nigerians must support the Buhari administration in clearing the Augean stable. However, tackling corruption alone will not leapfrog a nation from poverty to equitable prosperity. The economy has to be opened up. All vistas for unleashing potentials and creating new centres of development must be fully explored to raise revenues; create new capacities and facilitate new people-oriented investments.

Nations are as developed as the size of their budgets, global statistics show. A country like Norway with a little above 5 million people allocates over 200 billion dollars for its people, yet generates above 280 billion dollars as revenue; Nigeria currently allocates about 30 billion dollars as total expenditure, and runs a deficit budget for its 170 million population. But how can budgets and revenues be ramped? How can citizens latch onto programmes that can improve their lives? What actions need to be taken to close the increasing income gap between classes? How can these done in Nigeria especially when the future looks bleaker with reducing oil prices?

It is important for all hands to be on deck. But first, we have to diversify this economy. Diversification means looking beyond oil. The Federal Government needs to show its managerial creativity. Diversification also means looking beyond the national cake at the centre. It is time for states to become proactive, inward-looking, leverage on their comparative advantages, this Budget report shows.

It may not be easy but actions must be swift. The Federal government should invest in massive development programmes in the areas of critical infrastructure development. Nigeria's land laws need to be reformed to make lands more accessible for commercial farming. Agriculture should be used as a strategy for mass employment and wealth transfer to the poor citizens. And no, it is not enough to make policies, they must be executed and they must positively affect the farmers in the most rural communities. This will raise their purchasing power and create multi-sectorial ripple-effect in a manner that is assuring of inclusive development. Education is important. Girl-child literacy should be improved by providing opportunities for the over 10 million out-of-school children through access to quality public education. Adult literacy must be emphasized. Government needs to do more than mere lip service to education. Parents need to do more than enrolling their children in the public schools. The success of Nigeria in building an inclusively prosperous economy will represent a growth pole for Africa. This will be a huge incentive to the continent's collective aspiration to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.



**GIRLS, QUALITY EDUCATION
AND INEQUALITY**



GIRLS, QUALITY EDUCATION AND INEQUALITY

by Esther Agbarakwe

I am the fourth child and third daughter in a family of five children. My education was not a priority. But my mother whose secondary school education ended when she married my father made it her priority. My mother knows the value of education because she never had one. She took it upon herself to ensure that her children, boys and girls, got quality education despite low resources.

To my mother, education would give me the opportunity to shape my life. Then, I could go ahead and shape the society. Education would give me the key to lock the door of poverty and unlock a wealth of opportunities. She was right.

Education also opened my voice, and made it heard across the world, against issues around inequality. Without education, I may likely have been repeating a cycle: married off and maybe on the fourth child. No choice. No voice. Without a voice, I would not be writing this piece on inequality.

Ending inequality is possible. From my recent trip to Sweden for the Swedish Visitor's Programme, I understood that gender equality is one of the cornerstones of modern Swedish society. The overarching principle in Swedish gender policies is that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves. Everyone has a right to balance career and family. Everyone can live without the fear of abuse. This ensures that women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. Ironically, life itself is not fair. Some are born into wealth. Others are born into poverty. However, the Nigerian society, backed by the certain

traditions and thought patterns, has magnified this divide. This has undesirable consequences for a modern and interconnected society like ours.

Women and girls continue to be treated differently. When you are married, you are a good woman. When you have children, you are a better woman. When you have sons, you are the best woman. There are also women considered to be troublemakers. Those who do not fall within these structures. Those who question the structures. Those who open their mouths to challenge tradition.

Social inequality occurs when resources are distributed unevenly; typically through norms of allocation, that engender specific patterns along lines of socially defined categories of persons. From young women's access to reproductive health services, to disproportionate impact of climate change and women owning businesses, social inequality expresses itself through several dimensions.

In a society as diverse as Nigeria, where social inequality favours men more than women and certain parts of the country than others, inequality can be addressed through women's participation. This starts with education. Give a girl a pen to write her future. Send her to school, that is the first step. When girls are enrolled in school, they are given a golden opportunity to shape their future positively. They are better empowered to participate actively in family and governance. This singular action can reduce poverty and end social inequality. Let me tell you how.

According to the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty. It is simple: educated women are less likely to marry early and against their will. They are less likely to die

in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; and are more likely to send their children to school. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come. The UN agency also reaffirms that “Girls' education is essential to the achievement of quality learning relevant to the 21st century, including girls' transition to and performance in secondary school and beyond. Evidence shows that the return to a year of secondary education for girls correlates to a 25 per cent increase in wages later in life.”

In Nigeria, this is not just about book knowledge. We raise girls differently. Most girls are raised to be obedient. Do not look up when adults are talking. Be respectful. For many girls, only the affirmative “yes” exists, “no” is not in their dictionary. One way to end inequality is educating girls properly. It is important for women to know that they have a voice, and they can use it. It is important to encourage young women to ask critical questions and voice their opinions on issues. Recently, many internet-based platforms are showing many young women ways to express their views and build trust among themselves.

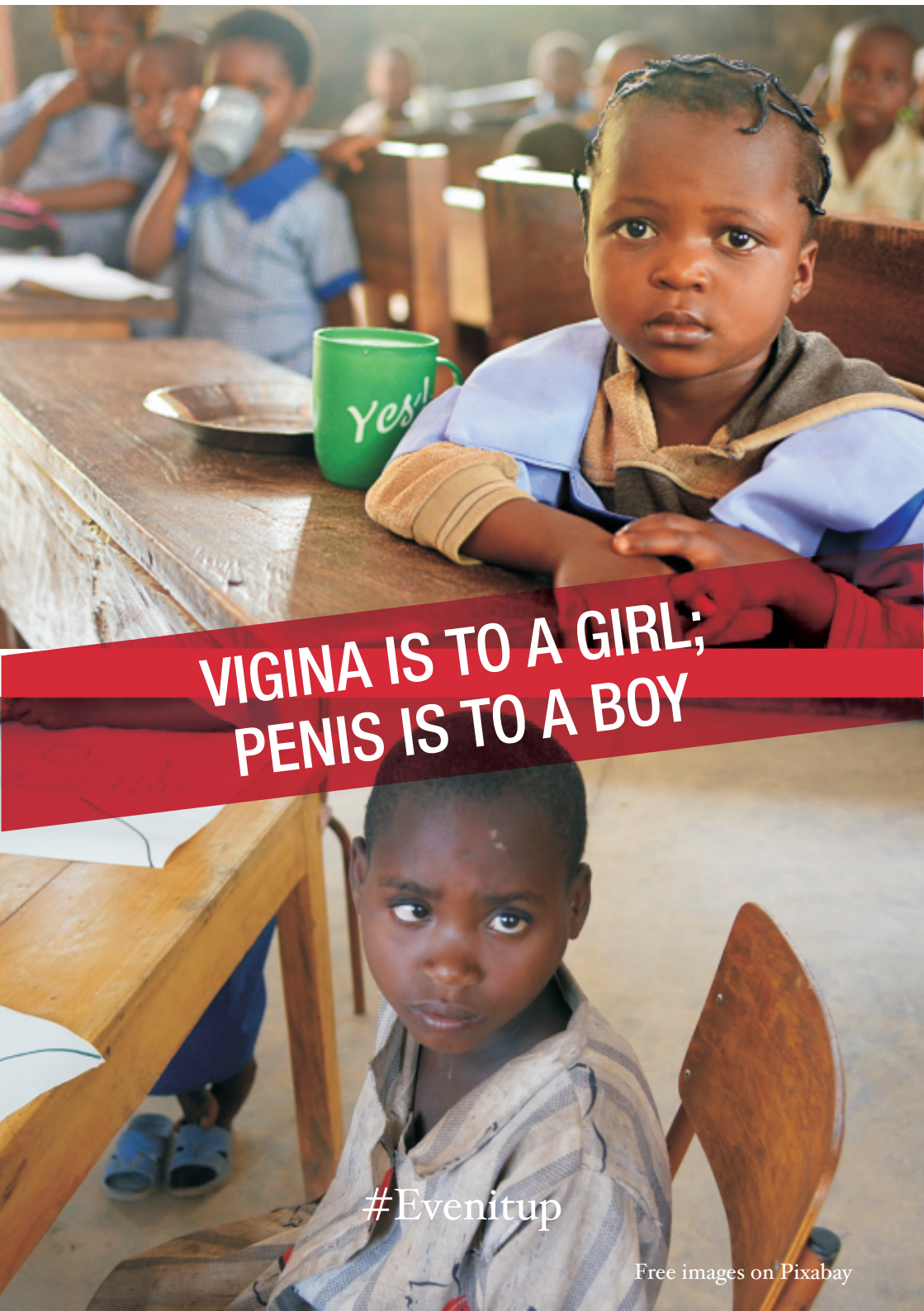
Social inequality is receiving deeper attention now, especially online where users of new media 'share' and 'engage' real-time. They discuss issues on inequality from personal experiences.

Discussions can lead to social actions to address the issues. This avenue is encouraging more women to make their voices heard. They also connect with people who share similar views. Social inequality is related to poverty, youth unemployment, communal conflicts, climate change and HIV/AIDS.

These disproportionately affect marginalised communities. Every day, these issues are thrown

around with hashtags and retweets on social media, among people with access, leaving those without access behind. Yet, these problems continue to fuel social inequality especially among communities where educational background and financial status defines an individual. Communities like ours.

Ending inequality is possible but it must be deliberate. Collectively, we must build trust which in turn can create social coercion, cooperation and joint problem-solving. And education, of girls and boys, makes this easier to achieve.



VIGINA IS TO A GIRL;
PENIS IS TO A BOY

#Evenitup

Free images on Pixabay

VAGINA IS TO A GIRL; PENIS IS TO A BOY

by Temitayo Olofinlua

Vagina is to a girl; penis is to a boy. That is the only difference between a boy and a girl at birth. The vagina and the penis should not define their aspirations as humans. Guess what, it is just a body part, like any other body part with physical functions. Those physical differences and functions are the only ones put there by God, since we love talking about God so much in Nigeria. Gender inequality starts when we accrue other functions to them, when, man begins to play god.

Gender inequality starts from when some are conceived. In some parts of the country, a boy is seen as more valuable than a girl. Once the mother does a scan and sees that the child is a girl, a certain gloom takes over her. The value of that child is reduced. Her aspirations are cut short. Her mother-in-law has told her that she is not a woman until she has a boy. She has been told that her feet in her husband's house is shaky until she has a boy that can carry on the name, the lineage.

Humans play god when the child is a baby. Boys do not cry. Girls can cry. Boys ride trucks. Girls play with dolls. Boy cross their legs and watch television. Girls close their legs and cut vegetables. There are stories of girls who stay out of schools only to hawk so that their brothers can stay in school. As teenagers, it is okay for boys to keep late nights. Girls are bound by curfews. It is okay for boys to be sexually active. It is not okay for girls to be deflowered. Yet, we only give them little sex education. When girls get pregnant for boys, it is the girls that stay out of school; the boy's education continues. For boys, multiple sexual partners is a sign of manhood. For girls, many boyfriends, even if there is no sexual relationship, is being loose. Loose girls have no place even in heaven in some religions. Yet, the boys can aspire to dreams of a heaven with plenty wine and virgins.

However, we forget that girls and boys are children. They should be raised as such. A girl should not be raised with

“ I love my daddy,
I love my Mummy.
I love them
solemnly. Mummy
cares for me.
Daddy provides
for my needs. I
love them
solemnly. ”

the burden of “womanhood” on her shoulder. A boy should not be raised with the burden of “manhood” on his shoulders. By all means, raise responsible children who will grow up to become adults; not children who are adults. How about raising children, boys and girls, to aspire to become anything in life: not just daddies and mummies?

“I love my daddy, I love my Mummy. I love them solemnly. Mummy cares for me. Daddy provides for my needs. I love them solemnly.”

Those are lines from a song that my two-year-old son sings. Daddy's duty is to provide for the family. Mummy's duty is to care for the family. Sometimes, he switches the roles. I smile. In reality, these roles switch. Does some caring not come with some providing? Does providing also not equate caring? We raise children to think along these gender lines through the kind of education they receive. Look at the books. The man is the doctor. The woman is the nurse. The man is the boss. The woman is the secretary. Don't we have women that are doctors and CEOs? Don't we have male nurses and secretaries? Look at the media. Mummy is always in the kitchen. Daddy is always in the office. The woman is always buying fashionable clothes after collecting money from the man. The man, is always flashing his teeth, behind his big car as he signs the cheque.

What pictures do we paint? Women who always depend on men. Women who cannot contribute to the society besides spitting out children. These pictures sink into a child's memory slowly. These children carry the baggage into adulthood. This baggage limits their aspirations. The girl begins to think that her aspiration in life is to become a Mrs-somebody, an appendage to a man. She in fact looks forward to her fairy tale wedding as the beginning of her life. She marries her boyfriend—emphasis on “boy”—but after the marriage, he becomes her husband. He carries the title “husband” around with

so much authority. She carries her “Mrs.” role around with so much humility. Her aspirations within her marriage is her definition of life. She bears children.

He accrues accolades. She trains the children. He accumulates concubines. She will do anything to remain a “Mrs.” even if it means dying at the hand of her spouse. Gender inequality is not fair to many women, as they are not able to fulfil life's potentials. Her aspirations are defined by their vaginas, or their breasts rather than their dreams and brains.

Gender inequality has negative impacts on men too. In this day when a child's school fees from primary through tertiary is more expensive than building a house; in this age, when anyone can lose a job at any time, is it not an unnecessary burden to expect one man, one human being to pay school fees; be a wife's emotional pillar; cater to in-laws and an endless list of expectations? Many men while chasing this life are not fathers to their children; neither are they sons to their mothers or husbands to their wives.

They do not enjoy life. Is there not something wrong with us if we say, a man cannot aspire to be something simply because it is solely reserved for women? What do we have? Many men falling like a pack of cards under the weight of societal expectations. Many frustrated men who do not live full lives. Many men who drown their sorrows in bottles of beer and between the laps of women. Broken beings who cannot cry.

Male and female: physical constructs. Husband and wife: social constructs. Societies should advance beyond these constructs to celebrate their humanity. Societies that advance allow their citizens, male and female, to prosper beyond their sexual organs. Societies that advance see people as humans, with dreams first, not as male or female. Developed societies let those dreams thrive. When

the dreams thrive, the society soars. No one asks: was it invented by a man or woman? I dream of a Nigeria where a human being will not be judged by their sex organ but by their contribution to the society.

Vagina is to a girl; penis is to a boy. That is the only difference between a boy and a girl at death. Everything in between is their contribution to the development of their society. Do not let the society limit you by your penis or your vagina.



**DEVELOPING ALTERNATE ELECTRICITY MODELS
- AN EQUALISING BRIDGE IN THE GROWING GAP
BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR**



#Evenitup

DEVELOPING ALTERNATE ELECTRICITY MODELS - AN EQUALISING BRIDGE IN THE GROWING GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR

by Ifeoma Malo

Up Nepa! Nigerians, rich and poor, know this phrase. Electricity is a leveler. Once there is no power, everyone is thrown into darkness.

Electricity is also a divider. Once there is no power, everyone shows their power through their response: huge generators; expensive solar panels, I-better-pass-my-neighbour generators, lanterns, solar lamps, torchlights, candles, and more. Many Nigerians get work done, despite power shortages yet, we should remember that there are many who cannot afford to pay for anything that can give them light. These people are the ones this article is about. This article is also about how government can reach them. And by doing that generate electricity for the rest of us. And provide jobs along the way.

During the “Safe Schools Initiative” launch in 2014 the immediate past Minister of Finance was reportedly told by affected communities that the biggest security concern in schools in the North-East region was the lack of electricity, not high walls. When Boko-Haram abducted the Chibok schoolgirls in April 2014, they arrived the school at night under the cover of darkness. They pretended to be Nigerian soldiers there to protect the students. Had there been adequate light, the girls might have been more aware of their danger and run for safety. Had there been light, the community would have been aware of the terrorists' movement. The nation would not have been lost in the dark, scurrying, asking: where did they take the girls?

The lack of electricity in Nigeria is a huge catalyst for rising insecurity. Energy is an important catalyst for economic and social development. It cannot be ignored. That is why several local and international initiatives have begun to address issues around energy poverty and energy sustainability across Africa.

In 2012, Nigeria privatised and reformed its electricity industry; the government sold all its generation and

distribution assets. However, in 2015, about a third of the country remains largely unconnected to the grid; and for those connected to the grid, it is unreliable. Many of the initiatives around the Nigerian electricity sector remain largely tied to transmission grid connection. This has stunted innovative thinking to address issues of electricity poverty and access. It is time to re-think electricity by creating opportunities to address energy poverty. This must be done deliberately. I share four ways to make this a reality.

1

It is important to create more opportunities for “embedded generation” and “captive power” to help our weakened grid.

First, it is important to create more opportunities for “embedded generation” and “captive power” to help our weakened grid. An embedded generating unit simply means a 'generating unit' that is directly connected within a distribution network rather than passing through the transmission network. The country's transmission grid is overloaded and many economic clusters will definitely benefit from embedded generation. This will also increase economic activities and foster job creation. NERC defines 'Captive Power Generation' as “generation not exceeding 1MW for the purpose of consumption by the generator, and which is consumed by the generator itself, and not sold to a third-party”. In other words, most renewable farms, usually large solar plants, can be “Captive Power Plants” if they are over 1MW in capacity setup by the generator for own use. Which brings me to the Renewable Revolution taking place across Africa.

Second, it is time to look somewhere else: renewable energy. Most underserved communities that lack electricity in Nigeria particularly in the North-East tend to be quite

2

It is time to look somewhere else: renewable energy. Most underserved communities that lack electricity in Nigeria particularly in the North-East tend to be quite isolated.

isolated. Off-grid technologies (and policies) can be a way to address energy poverty in these areas, particularly as grid connection may be slow to get there and may not make economic sense in the short term. There is an increasing interest in renewable energy projects but there is no clear strategy on its deployment as a way to drive access and create economic clusters. Nigeria's recent renewable energy policy is a first step, but needs a lot of work to link the policy and its implementation strategy to strong economic generating activities either through agriculture, ICT, or manufacturing. This has to assume some urgency so that underserved communities most affected by the burgeoning wealth gap will have greater opportunities for development.

3

It is important to create opportunities for young Nigerians in the emerging electricity sector which has huge potentials for growth.

Third, it is important to create opportunities for young Nigerians in the emerging electricity sector which has huge potentials for growth. Government can partner with development agencies, tertiary and vocational schools to scale up training and capacity building, particularly in the constantly evolving area of renewables and energy-efficient infrastructure. This is yet to make it into most engineering curriculums in the country. I see a future where knowledge from higher institutions can translate into localised manufacturing in this industry. This will spin out other outlets for creative entrepreneurship and disruptive innovation similar to what has occurred in the ICT space. Four, the design of a better civic engagement strategy in the energy sector. This can be done by ensuring gender representation in the design, development and implementation of energy initiatives. Numerous studies show that women are the most affected by energy deficit, inefficient supply of electricity or by issues related to affordability. It is important that as

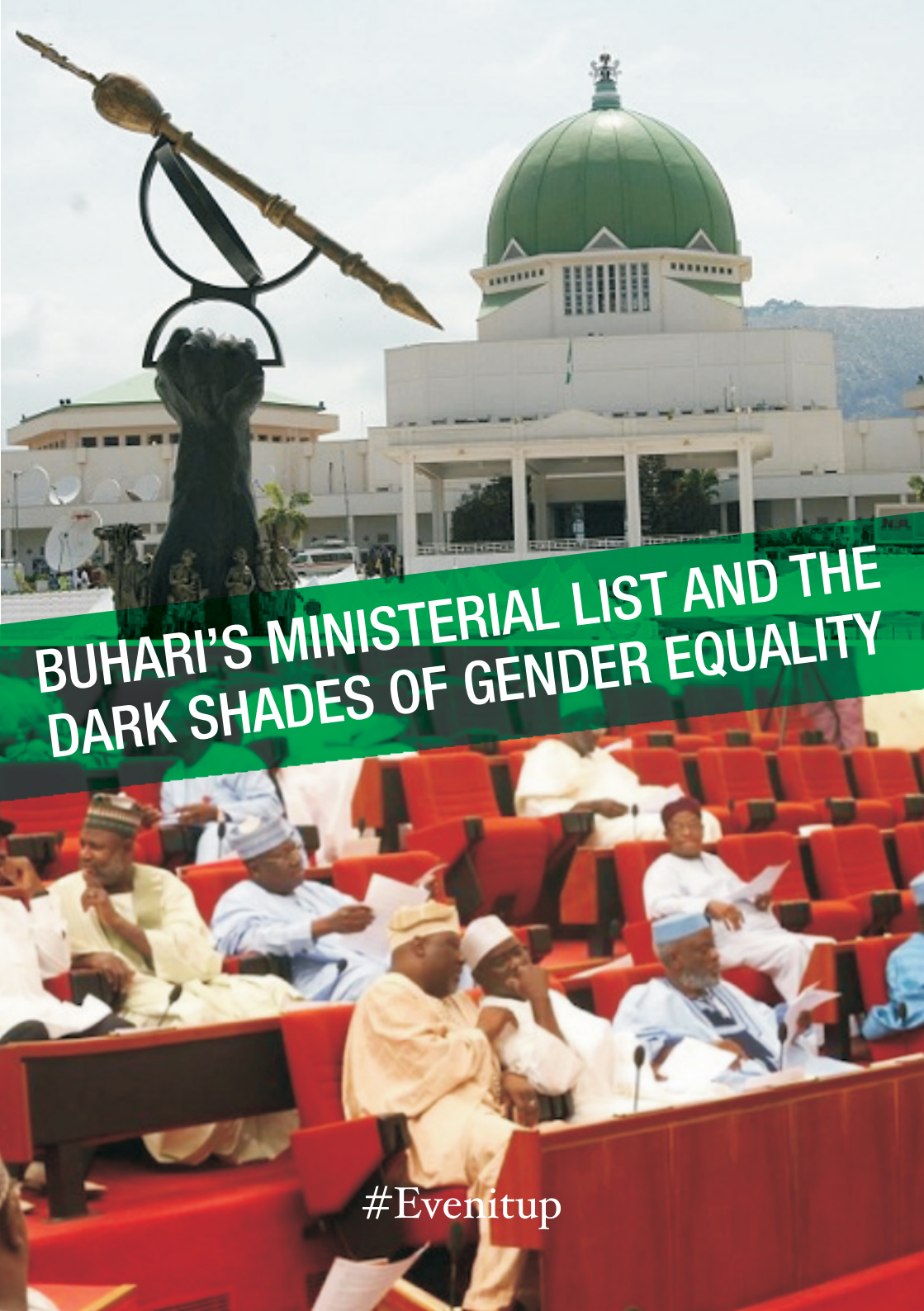
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The design of a better civic engagement strategy in the energy sector.

the largest consumers of energy products especially in the homes, there ought to be energy programmes targetted at women. This goes beyond clean stove initiatives introduced by the previous administration. It should include an active mainstreaming of gender in reform initiatives. This will develop expertise for women in the energy industry. It will also set a more robust development framework that will create better economic opportunities; foster local entrepreneurship; promote inter-community collaborations and sustainable cultural change in the way we use electricity in homes and communities across Nigeria.

Nothing I have written here is exactly new. However, it bears continuous repetition (and in some cases refining) to enable us understand what is at stake. We cannot treat a sector as important as the energy sector as a quasi-primary sector as we have done in the past. While initiatives by the last administration are laudable, there is more to be done. Electricity is ONE of the main ways the inequality gap can be addressed. It is a major way to ensure that we do not leave a huge population of the country behind and expect peaceful co-existence. It is therefore time to not just make it a priority, but to make it an emergency.

Then, it will be time to stop saying Up Nepa! For there will always be light!



BUHARI'S MINISTERIAL LIST AND THE DARK SHADES OF GENDER EQUALITY

#Evenitup

BUHARI'S MINISTERIAL LIST AND THE DARK SHADES OF GENDER EQUALITY

by Victoria Ohaeri

Out of 36 ministerial nominees, only 6 are women. The 6 female nominees are no doubt, distinguished professionals who have excelled in finance, sustainable development, extractive industries, pension administration and politics. Two ugly trends dim the shine in the ministerial list, in that they strongly depict the perpetuation of gender inequality in Nigeria's governance infrastructure and political systems.

First, the huge gap in gender representation in the proposed federal cabinet rolls back the equality gains made between 2011 and 2015 when more women were influential decision-makers and held a good number of powerful cabinet and corporate executive positions. Most progressive nations in the world have moved away from this sort of regression in gender representation, with many of them coming together to codify their denunciation of gender inequality in numerous international and regional agreements. Not only that, women's underrepresentation in the proposed cabinet disaffirms the Affirmative Action of 35% representation for women, and more particularly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which Nigeria's Muhammadu Buhari joined world leaders to endorse in New York just last month. The 2030 Agenda underlines that “women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making.”

The second concerning trend is the rising expectation for women to be exceptionally competent in order to qualify for public office. This is not bad per se, except that there is no similar expectation for their male counterparts. If you followed the media (both mainstream and the social media) reportage and analysis of the qualification and performance of the nominees at the ministerial screening, it was shocking to see the extent the women's professional credentials, diction, accent, appearance, comportment,

(even their dressing) were vigorously scrutinised and dissected by skilled and amateur analysts. Ironically, some of their male counterparts were assessed based on the quality of their jokes! Being male was the most important qualification they needed. Any other thing that accompanied their maleness was just an added advantage, without which they would still have scaled through.

These trends are concerning for many reasons. The first consequence is the potential to legitimise in a subtle manner, the unequal standards of qualification for public office between the sexes. As these trends gradually seep into the psyche of an average Nigerian, the pressure on women will continue to mount: the pressure to surpass ordinariness and insignificance before they can merit consideration for barely non-existent ministerial positions. Secondly, what President Buhari's 6-out-of-36 governance style has done is to reinforce historical constructs that confer minority status on women: showing that women are only up there as mere appendages to men; or to put up appearances of gender participation in order to stave off public opprobrium.

Anecdotal and statistical evidence are incrementally establishing strong connections between economic growth and gender equality. In 2010, Chatham House and Vivid Economics relied on the targets enumerated in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 3-5 to demonstrate the positive correlation between gender equality and economic performance. They advanced that gender inequality in education and employment lowers the average productivity of the labour force, thereby limiting economic growth by lowering the return on new investment. In the same vein, increased female participation in governance may lead governments to adopt more redistributive policies and lower government budget deficits as established by studies

conducted in Switzerland in 1999 (Abrams and Settle) and 2007 (Krogstrup and Wälti). More tellingly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) powerfully condenses these findings in its 4 building blocks of gender equality: political empowerment, economic participation, physical wellbeing and educational attainment.

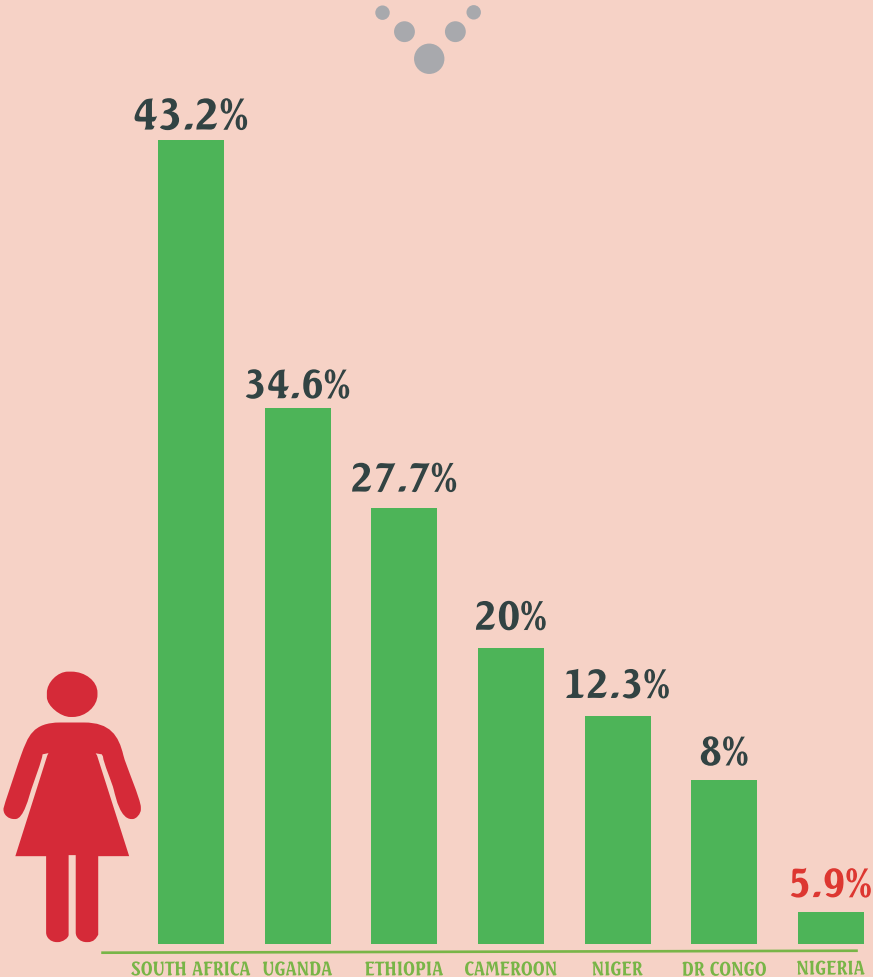
In Nigeria, the relationship between gender equality and economic growth may have to be explored further. Nevertheless, from 2011 to 2015 when more women superintended executive policymaking and corporate boardrooms, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product witnessed unrivalled upward reviews, reaching an all-time high of 568.51 billion dollars in 2014. Reports from the national statistical bureau show that Nigeria's GDP rose to 6.54 percent in the second quarter of 2014. Some might attribute the high GDP figures to high oil prices, and the rebasing of the economy in 2014; but results from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and PriceWaterHouseCoopers show that while the oil sector faced production challenges in 2014, the non-oil sector – driven by growth in activities such as crop production, telecommunications, textile, real estate – recorded real growth of 7.51% in the third quarter of 2014. Evidently, the high price of oil alone was not responsible for the growth in the local economy. Even when the economy was rebased from about USD 270 billion to USD 510 billion for 2013, more than 90% of the increase was attributed to new sectors of the economy that were previously under-captured such as the movies, telecommunications, and other retail activities. Women are very active participants in the non-oil sector of the Nigerian economy, especially the named activities that have contributed to the astronomical rise in the GDP.

While women's marked visibility in social and

economic governance is desirable, the government should as a matter of urgency, take steps to deliver concrete developmental benefits to millions of women, especially those at the lower rung of the ladder: the market women, the street sweepers, the petty traders, the rural farmers, domestic servants, and more. These laborious occupations undertaken by poorer women have bolstered informal economic activities: created jobs; provided financial security for many households; expanded public access to basic goods and services, while contributing in no small measure to national economic growth and development. In the Nigeria where women have no inheritance or succession rights to property, and are traditionally deprived of important empowering resources – in terms of access to land, education, health care, labour market opportunities – gender equality means much more than having a few women in positions of influence and power.

Gender Representation Across African Countries

In 2011 elections, Nigerian women had a dismal representation of 5.9% in the national legislature, compared to most other African countries: Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%) and DR Congo (8.0%)



A woman in a patterned top is working at a makeshift stall. She is surrounded by various goods, including a large pile of red tomatoes, several bottles of water, and bags of flour. The stall is constructed from wooden planks and is situated outdoors. The background shows a wooden structure with more bottles of water hanging from it. The overall scene suggests a small-scale, informal market or food processing area.

**SUSTAINABILITY & VALUE CREATION AS
CATALYST TO BRIDGING INEQUALITY**

[#Evenitup](#)

SUSTAINABILITY & VALUE CREATION AS CATALYST TO BRIDGING INEQUALITY

by Emilia Asim - Ita

The concept of Inequality stems from a school of thought that populations are divided across basic factors such as wealth, income and consumption (2015, Wikipedia). This holds true for most of the academic justification of these elements or criteria for categorization of citizens in any economy. However, in my opinion, true inequality is mainly manifest in the existence of - or a clear perception of - an imbalance in availability and access to economic infrastructure such as reliable communication systems, energy supply, effective transportation, financial institutions as well as access to finance, social justice, markets and distribution networks.

In addition, non restriction of various levels of free trade, competition in enterprise value, open markets and others auxiliary factors which make for better human existence and decent standard of living should not be ignored.

“If any of us is
unequal, None of us is
equal”

Amina J. Mohammed,
Fmr. Asst. UN
Sec. Gen.,
Post 2015 Agenda
Honourable Minister for
Environment, Nigeria

Just before my thoughts are trumped by the dynamics of free trade and open markets; might I draw attention to two possible forms of inequality – one where a segment of the population feels unequal in spite of the economic indices and another where many segments of the population feel equal and strive to bridge the existent gaps between their economic statuses and the creation and retention of wealth. In both scenarios, inequality will have various effects on the economy and living standards of citizens however, what differs in both circumstances is the enthusiasm and resilience of the population to proffer solutions to the myriad of challenges.

Therefore, if my uncertified assumptions were right, the real meaning of inequality would lie in the disparity or perception of same hinged on the prevailing socio-economic circumstances of any economy, as well as the

instruments of state such as social justice, continuous creation of jobs, potential of skills and even a system of merit. Similar instruments in other climes power cultural dogmas such as the American Dream.

The quest for sustainable development can be likened to the search for eradicating inequality, a holy grail. However, bridging the gap in inequality is a tool to attaining sustainable development. The first task of reducing inequality in any emerging economy especially the largest in the most promising continent is the promotion and possible mainstreaming of sustainable development issues. The promotion of living standards, accessible primary health care, available basic education, affordable housing and social amenities will ensure individuals are empowered to actively contribute to bridging the inequality gap.

It is sad to observe that sustainable investments are still far and in between despite the emergence of auspicious-sounding phenomena such as Socially Responsible Investing, Impact Investing and recently, Afrocapitalism. To a typical citizen living below the poverty line, these terminologies do not hold water. Sustainable investments resonate with the majority of populations where the modalities are feasible within the local economic contexts. Hence, advocacy for Africans to invest in Africa, for instance, will remain mere rhetoric if the investment climate does not yield high returns with minimized risks as well as products and services in demand at every fiscal period in context. With the current interest rates from banks and even development finance institutions, payment cycles (spanning 60 – 120 days of credit from clients and to vendors) that

cripple cash flow projections for small businesses and dependent workers, the supply chain is at risk and such indices deepen inequality.

Therefore MSME Development is key and not paying lip service as our public and private sector leaders have done in past decades. Our billionaire Chief Executives cannot achieve this through grants and hype-focused charity initiatives but through a silent revolution training and impacting one life, one MSME at a time. Nonetheless, this painstaking work is not theirs alone to do, as each entrepreneur should focus on growing the enterprise as well as grooming another leader in his/her stead. Perhaps, if the success of enterprises were measured in a financial to talent growth ratio, we would realize that many successful organisations could be likened to empty shells or sprouting plants waiting to wither once the founder kicks the bucket.

The future of talent and content is the balance upon which the entire future of our world as we understand it today, depends. In an economy where talent is not nurtured, reproduced and protected, the value of human livelihood is greatly threatened. Sadly, our environment still permeates a culture of placing a higher value on foreign talent over local content. In circumstances where many organisations that position as celebrated corporate citizens keep a retinue of foreign consultants and experts, yet pledge loyalty to the growth of a host country, inequality (of services and talent) will persist. What some refer to as 'Contextual Intelligence' cannot be ignored i.e. good grasp of local environments merged with global best practices and expertise. What Africa urgently needs is a deliberate, sustained investment in people through skill acquisition, transfer and development – the burden of talent is the singular most prevalent

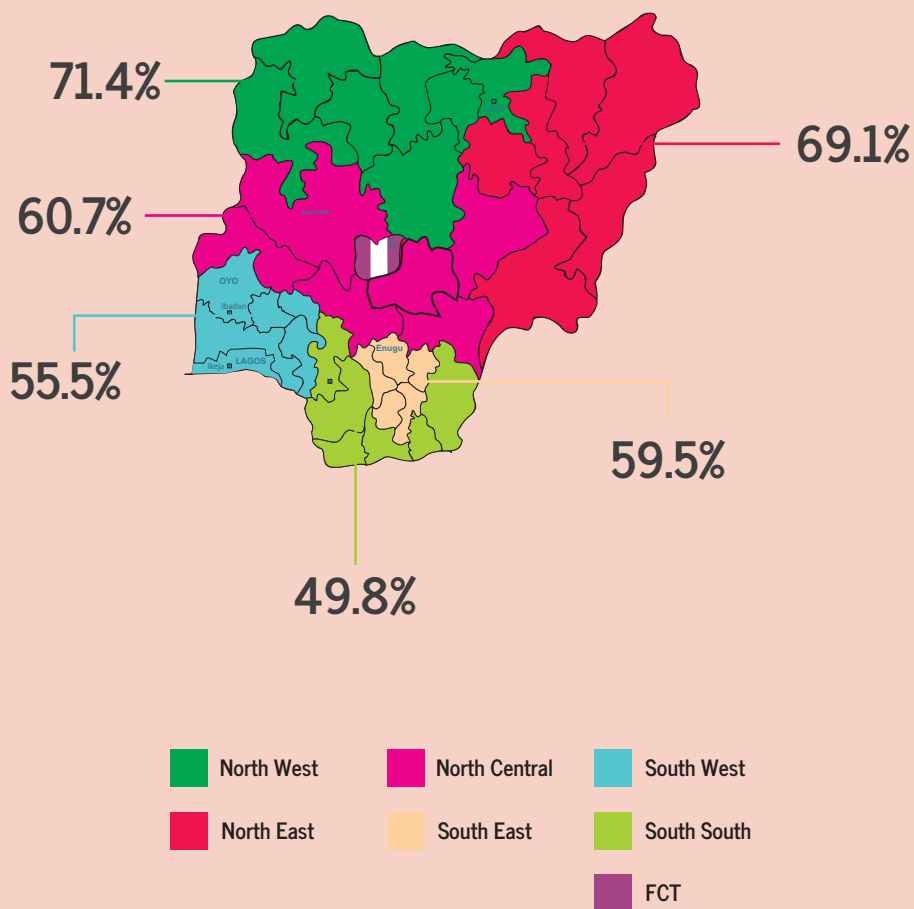
challenge for Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises in Nigeria and Africa.

Over the past decade working in Management Consulting focused on Sustainability (MSME Support, CSR, Corporate Governance, Sustainable Development & Project Management) for the past 5 years, after the same period working in the Media and Youth Development Sectors; it is obvious that sustainability will serve as the most reliable catalyst for bridging inequality in Africa's largest economy. Sustainability in this case, is defined from a value perspective, which is the most holistic scope to view this fundamental imperative. It sounds quite simple yet has far reaching effects on the economy and society.

We cannot attempt to ameliorate the consequences of inequality without building a value system and constantly strengthening the system upon which this value depends – it all adds up and flows from one branch to another.

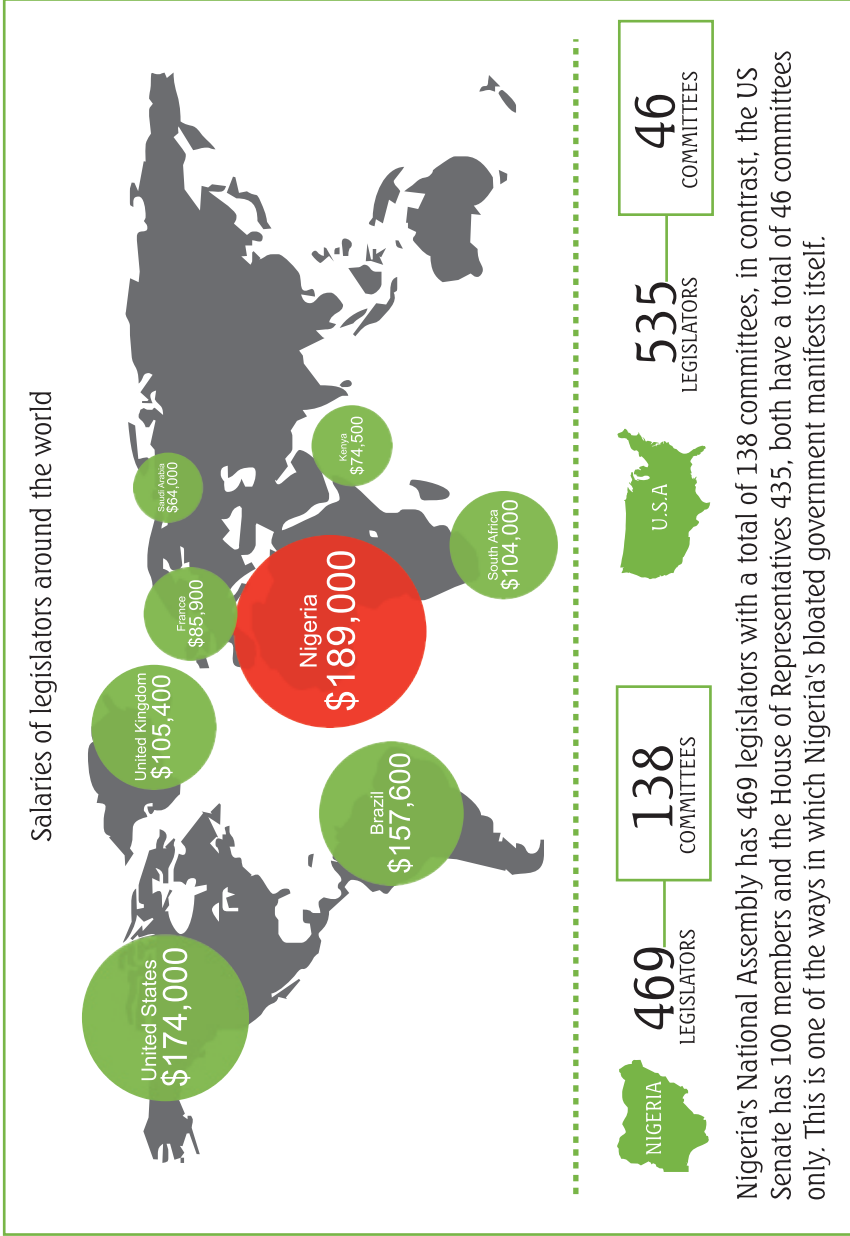
TRENDS IN POVERTY BY GEOPOLITICAL ZONES

% people living in poverty



Source: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)

The prohibitive cost of governance.



OLAPEJU OLASUNKANMI



Olapeju holds a Masters of Technology Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the Federal University of Technology, Akure in Nigeria. He teaches Planning at the School of Environmental Studies, Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State.

He is one of the youngest Chartered City Planners in Nigeria, and consults widely in the fields of Environmental, Housing and Development Planning. This article is part of the #eventup Campaign by Budget and Oxfam, Nigeria.

ESTHER AGBARAKWE



Esther Agbarakwe is very passionate about leveraging new media to connect, inform and empower young Africans on climate change and other development issues. She is the founder of SocialGood Nigeria and advisor to +SocialGood at the United National Foundations, Washington DC and advisor to the African Youth Initiative on Climate change (AYICC).

She shares her thoughts on twitter as @estherclimate.

FEYI FAWEHINMI



Feyi Fawehinmi is a qualified accountant and has been working in London's financial services industry across the banking, insurance and asset management sectors for the last decade.

He writes regularly about economics and government policy in Nigeria on his blog aguntasolo.com. He is also an amateur photographer and enjoys travelling. He lives in the UK.

**TEMITAYO
OLOFINLUA**



Temitayo Olofinlua is an award-winning essayist, freelance writer and editor. She lives in Ibadan where she manages liveinibadan.com, a lifestyle content website on the city of Ibadan.

IFEOMA MALO



Ifeoma is the Ceo of Clean Tech Hub And Energy Innovation Center, Abuja.

She was the immediate past Senior Policy Adviser on Energy Policies, Regulations and Partnerships to the Honorable Minister of Power in Nigeria.

Ify is a qualified attorney with graduate advanced degrees in Law, Business and Public Policy. She is a Caux Scholar, 2004; PIA – African Leadership Forum fellow 2012; A Desmond Tutu Fellow 2013; A Crans Montana New Leaders Fellow 2014 and a Dwight Eisenhower Fellow for 2015.

**ASIM
ITA EMILIA E.**



Asim – Ita Emilia E.; Senior Consultant, Strategy & External Relations, Thistlepraxis Consulting.

Emilia drives the Strategy and External Relations portfolios for ThistlePraxis Consulting as Senior Consultant and is daily responsible for developing strategy for all client briefs, company projects and initiatives. She started ThistlePraxis Consulting Limited in July 2010 as Managing Consultant responsible for the brand blueprints, set up and roll-out of operations.

A graduate of Mass Communication from the University of Lagos, she has vast experience in Corporate Communications, PR/Media, Development Communications and all aspects of Media production (print, electronic and digital) as well as Sustainability & CSR.

OLUSEUN ONIGBINDE



Oluseun is the Team Lead/ Co-Founder of BudgIT, an organization that has led the initiative of developing a public data visualization Platform for Nigeria's budget. He has led in strategy formulation, goal definition, and content curation for an organization voted as one of the top ten start-ups in 2011.

Having worked on restructuring the Nigerian budget data, He is now developing open budget architecture and tax visualization with his team members.

BudgIT under his leadership has been able to offer mobile and online solution to trigger discussions around the budget and take the budget beyond a news item to a focal point of debate among Nigerians.

VICTORIA OHAERI



Victoria Ohaeri is an SXSW 2013 honoree, a Brot fur die Welt scholar and Harvard University alumni with over 10 years advocacy work and public speaking experience in Africa, Europe, North and South America. She is known for her legal and policy researches, social media campaigning and public commentary on energy, environment, urban governance, gender and human rights in Nigeria and abroad.

She is currently the executive director of SPACES FOR CHANGE (www.spacesforchange.org)- a policy advocacy group that works to increase the participation of women, youth and communities in the development of social and economic policy, and also help public authorities and corporate entities put human rights at the heart of their decision-making.

budgIT

www.yourbudgit.com



OXFAM

BudgIT Address:
3rd Floor, 13, Hughes Avenue, Alagomeji,
Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

 : www.yourbudgit.com

 : info@yourbudgit.com

 : [@budgITng](https://twitter.com/budgITng)

 : www.facebook.com/budgitng

OXFAM Address:
11 Ganges Street, Off Alvan Ikoku Way,
Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria

 : www.oxfam.org/nigeria

 : [www.twitter.com/oxfaminnigeria](https://twitter.com/oxfaminnigeria)