

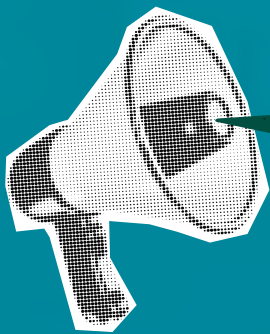
THE
NIGERIAN
SYMPOSIUM
FOR

YOUNG &
EMERGING
LEADERS

Theme:

PEOPLE,
POLITICS
& POWER

A WHITE PAPER



Wednesday, October 12th, 2022

Presented by:



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

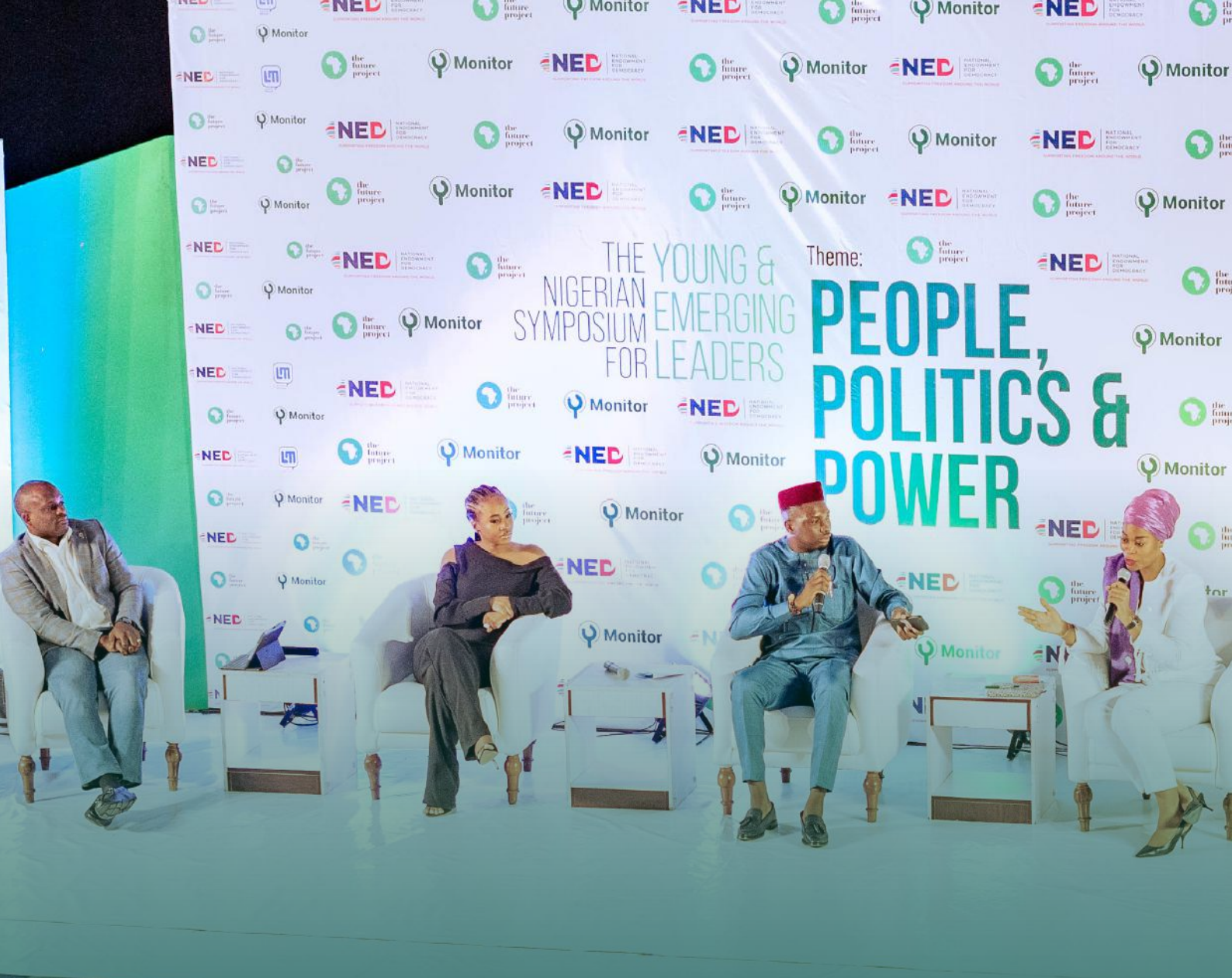
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ABOUT THE NIGERIAN SYMPOSIUM FOR YOUNG AND EMERGING SYMPOSIUM

The Nigerian Symposium for Young and Emerging Leaders is an annual knowledge exchange and mentorship event between present and emerging leaders. During the symposium, critical national questions, politics, economics, and governance are unpacked to develop sound policy options and recommendations for development.

In seven (7) years, the Symposium has served as a reliable channel of interaction between high-level public officeholders and the citizens to evaluate the impact of policies on citizens, affording these citizens an avenue to ask critical questions and get corresponding answers.

It has hosted top government functionaries including the Director-General, World Trade Organization, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; Federal Minister of State for Health, Dr Adeleke Mamora; Former Executive Governor of Ekiti State, Dr Kayode Fayemi; Former Executive Governor of Anambra and Labour Party Presidential Candidate, Peter Obi, Former Executive Governor of Rivers State, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Amaechi, among others.

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THE 2022 SYMPOSIUM

This year, the Symposium's objective is to dive deeper into probable strategies and solutions on the broad issues of good governance, politics, and popular participation.

2022 THEME: PEOPLE, POWER AND POLITICS

The Symposium, which was held at Agip Hall, Muson Center, Onikan, Lagos, featured the following: Expansive exchange of ideas and knowledge focused on leadership, governance, policies and the challenge of involvement, especially youth influence.

Panel sessions and discussions: this symposium brought together leaders in politics, business, advocacy, socialpreneurs and many more to engage and discuss the theme 'People, Power and Politics'.

Insightful question and answer sessions and contributions from participants, thus making the conversation more robust and engaging.

Speakers at the Symposium included:

Aisha Yesufu, *Activist and Convener of Citizen Hub*

Tacha Akide, *Social Advocate and Entrepreneur*

Adenike Oriowo, *Representative of the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner, Lagos*

Agarau Idowu, *Spokesperson for Olajide Adediran (JANDOR), PDP Gubernatorial candidate for Lagos*

Khadijah Okunnu-Lamidi, *SDP Presidential Aspirant*

Anto Lecky, *Art and Special Projects Lead, ElectHER*

Damilola Emmanuel, *Managing Director, Lagos State Waterways Authority*

Somkele Awa-Kalu, *Special Assistant to the President on Economic Research and Analytics*

Titilola Akinsola, *Legal Practitioner and Managing Partner, Grace Crest Attorney.*





STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This paints a picture that people hold power and determine how it is gained and used. However, this ideal is different from the Nigerian reality. There has been a shift in the balance of power, and the term 'people' no longer holds as much relevance or status as it should. This impact is manifest in our everyday life and has triggered debates, protests, and yearnings for a government that is genuinely for the people.

Recent events have spotlighted youth inclusion in governance from the grassroots to higher levels. Many are for the argument that the low rate of participation of the youth in government is a red flag for Nigeria's democracy. The children are undoubtedly the driving force of Nigeria's development and need adequate governance representation.

Nigeria is a force to reckon with, and as a nation, it is yet to reach the full extent of its potential. However, it

will be impossible to achieve this if it cannot balance the relationship between people, power, and politics. Nigeria's journey to genuine democracy and the nation of our dreams since 1960 will only seem further away from fruition if it cannot attain this balance.

The notion that power only belongs to the elite and a selected few must be erased. Instead, we need to unlearn power as we know it and learn it as it should be.

We cannot continue to separate people from politics and power; without them, neither concept would exist. Therefore, the people must reclaim their power in determining how those they elect to be in power use it; for the growth and development of the nation.

The People, Power and Politics theme seeks to spotlight the collective power of 'people', its impact on politics and governance, and how it can be optimised.



First Panel Session: Young People and the Politics of Money in Nigeria

The politics of money is shrinking the Nigerian political space, and it has become a significant determinant of who participates in electoral politics. The politics of money in Nigeria encourages politicians - who are now investors in Nigerian politics - to pursue selfish financial benefits ahead of the people's collective good. Thus, politicking has become a marketing platform where the highest bidders dictate the pulse and tune of Nigerian affairs. In today's Nigeria, money supersedes votes and voice, hence the proliferation of vote buying. Vote buying has been part of Nigeria's electoral history, especially since the return of democracy in 1999. But it has assumed a more glaring dimension in the recent elections. The introduction of digital technology has made electoral malpractice difficult. This has put electoral power back in the hands of youths, who may choose to use it as they wish—agreeing to sell their vote or refusing to do so.

Nigerian political campaigns are money guzzlers. Huge money is expended on consultations and engagements with essential stakeholders and "big players" - monarchs: religious leaders, youth leaders, and women leaders. The financial journey from consultation to political advertisements is humongous, from the cost of political adverts in the media, rallies, security, and well-sourced political office to paying poll agents on election days. The fees identified so far do not include expenses on possible pre-electoral and electoral lawsuits.

Another manifestation of money politics is the expression of form interest in Nigeria; for instance, it has become so high that only the rich can participate in party primaries. This was evident in the cost of nomination forms for the major political parties. Money politics is not only limited to nomination forms or general election buying. The 2022 primary and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria brought to the fore the reality of the inducement of party delegates. According to news reports, representatives of the primary elections of the two major parties were paid thousands of dollars to induce them to vote for specific candidates.

With all these firmly in place, can the intelligent, patriotic, poor youth ever get to the pedestal of political power? And will our type of democracy ever favour those on the lowest rung of the societal ladder? Society cannot sit duck and allow our rights as youths to be robbed and taken from us, so what is the solution to the menace of money politics in Nigeria?

Panellist:

Khadijah Okunnu-Lamidi, SDP Presidential Aspirant

Anto Lecky, Art and Special Projects Lead, ElectHER

Damilola Emmanuel, Managing Director, Lagos State Waterways Authority

Moderator:

Temidayo Taiwo-Sidiq





RESPONSES:

Moderated by Temidayo Taiwo-Sidiq, an ace political analyst and content editor, the panel focused on the issue of money politics in Nigeria and how it influences young people's political participation and ambition.

Taiwo-Sidiq opened the conversation with a question directed at Anto Lecky, Art and Special Projects Lead, ElectHER, "how significant is money politics in Nigeria?". Lecky responded; "Money matters". In Nigeria, money politics is an essential part of the political process. Lecky had opined that the appropriate question should have been, "How is this money raised? And how are they circulated?". She stressed that the need for heavy funds to campaign for political posts in the country continues to hamper the chances of young women.

On the importance of money in politics, Lecky stressed that young people, most significantly, are most adversely affected by this phenomenon. She said money politics serves as a barrier that deters young women from politics. She noted that the average political officer/politician is rich, which makes it easier for them to attain their political goals, unlike young people with limited access to economic opportunities and resources. To bridge the gap in money politics between young people and the old order, she emphasised the importance of donation and crowdfunding. She stated, "we must be honest and understand that to run for politics costs money",

Moving away from Lecky to Khadijah Okunnu -Lamidi, SDP Presidential Aspirant, the moderator jolted our memory back to 1953; he referenced Anthony Enahoro as pushing for independence. He asked, "Many of our leaders came to prominence when they

were young, but it is different today. Is Money politics deterring young people - is it a necessary evil or economic reality?"

Okunnu-Lamidi replied; "I believe money politics is cogent, but its effects are overestimated". Okunnu-Lamidi revealed one of her significant objectives in the running for office was to understand the intricacies of government and politics. She qualified politics in Nigeria as "muddy water that is not deep but made to seem deep". She stressed that she ran for office and did not pay for her nomination form, "there are options, but we are looking at two parties," she told the audience. She stated that young people limit their options when seeking political posts by restricting themselves to major political parties. She stressed the need to look beyond the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP), as many parties offer cheap tickets or no cost.

Okunnu-Lamidi responded to a comment saying, "politics is not for the elite". She opined; "politics is for the elite". She noted the elites are not the wealthiest in society; they [elites] are the people who are concerned about the development of society. She also advised young people always to prioritise development against personal gains; the struggle for financial gains contributes massively to our country's development.

Referencing the age of the APC National Youth Leader, (36 years), and PDP National Youth Leader, (25 years) the moderator asked; "are the young people beating the old people?" Damilola Emmanuel established that by being passionate about the change that they desire, young people will take their rightful place. "We must be passionate about the change that we desire".

Lecky, while responding to a question on the drop in youth political candidacy, noted that there is a national disinterest in politics, and we must note that there is a difference in political support and candidacy. She stated, “I think a lot of young people who may be interested in contesting for political posts in the country are now leaving - the japa wave”. This statement underscores the significant consequences of brain drain on our political scene.

Okunnu-Lamidi noted that politics is a continuum, “wherever I stop, the young people will continue from there”. She extolled the importance of diversity in politics, the need to carry and prioritise all demography and sectors, “no child must be left behind”, an expression she used to establish that nobody must be left behind. Politics changed the mindset and ideology of individuals, and Okunnu-Lamidi blamed this on the system. She believes the system needs an overhaul, and the people need a system that allows them to retain their ideologies despite the rigours of politicking. For the youths to climb the ladder of power, they attain self-leadership, the ability to make favourable decisions and systems that benefits them.

Emmanuel noted that we are in a time and generation that provides opportunities for public discussion and engagement. The information available to young people on politics and government is unprecedented. Emmanuel said the availability of this voluminous information could be attributed to the proliferation of social media. Emmanuel told the audience that for one to achieve their goal in politics, absolute dedication is needed. Talking further about achieving our goals and making the change we desire, Emmanuel stressed the importance of leading by example.

With contributions from the panellists, Taiwo-sidiq

asked the audience to send in their questions.

Responding to the question on intellectual elitism in politics, Okunnu-Lamidi maintained that intellectuals are open to new arguments, and the openness to new ideas makes it possible to challenge the status quo. “We have people stuck in their ways, hence why succession is not coming forth,” she stressed further. Intellectual elitism gives room for the society to grow new age leaders.

On threats in politics, Okunnu-Lamidi noted that politicians must have a “streak of agbero” in them, and they must get their tribe (a group of people who believes in one’s cause). She stressed the need for good relationships and connections to be able to navigate the rough terrain.

Lecky opined that the #EndSARS protest was a significant turning point in the Nigerian polity. She established that many young people got the urge to do more in Nigerian politics due to the march; such awakening birthed conversations like the “People, Politics and Power”, an avenue for people to discuss the state of our country. She stressed further, “not everyone can run for political office, but we must be reinvigorated to demand a better country”. She talked about the benefits of financing a politician or political officer runner who shares one’s ideology and perspectives. Taiwo-Sidiq interjected, “If you cannot find a seat at the table, you can contribute to buying nails to make the table”.

On young people and women supporting each other, Emmanuel answered, “Support is born when we create the right environment”. Okunnu-Lamidi, on the other hand, declared that “women do support each other”. She supported her statement using references from her presidential campaign.





Second Panel Session - Hashtags to Ballots: Raising the Bar for Political Participation in Nigeria's 2023 Elections

In Nigeria, the youth demonstrated the tremendous power of social media when they organised protests against police brutality in 2020. That singular protest, especially the effective coordination of the march before hoodlums and state interference hijacked it, raised the question of the power and influence of social media in the country's politics.

Social media has radically democratised the public sphere. Social media is so powerful that any political actor discountenancing it does that at his/her peril. Although it has not entirely replaced the traditional media as the fulcrum of political activism, it is the melting pot of political debates and the crucible of political wrestling in recent times.

Social media optimists are propping the platform as a significant shaper of the 2023 election. However, critics have maintained reservations about the potency of the political activism on the platform to do tangible and physical activities in the buildup to the 2023 election.

What is the influence of media access on the political knowledge of Nigerian youths? To a considerable extent, do you think the outcome of the 2023 elections may be influenced majorly by social media? How can online political participation turn into active and physical political involvement?

Panellist:

Aisha Yesufu, activist and convener of Citizen Hub

Tacha Akide, social advocate and entrepreneur

Adenike Oriowo, Representative of the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner, Lagos

Agarau Idowu, Spokesperson for Olajide Adediran (JANDOR), PDP Gubernatorial candidate for Lagos

Moderator:

Sandra Ezekwisilli



RESPONSES:

Opening the panel session, Sandra Ezekwesili, the moderator, threw the first question at Tacha Akide saying, “What do you think is the reason behind this sudden effectiveness and takeover by young Nigerians?”

Akide responded saying, “the average Nigerian youth is tired”. The development of the past years - inflation, insecurity, corruption, bad economy etc. - continues to spur young people’s interest in politics. She explained that a whole lot of young people have grown tired of the way things are going. Many say that the system needs to change, and they don’t want to be stuck in it any longer.

Aisha Yesufu spoke on the crucial role of the #End-SARS protest in the increased interest of young people in Nigerian politics. She described this as “an awakening”.

“The phenomenal thing right now is that young Nigerians are ready to take the citizens’ office”. Yesufu stated while emphasising the effect of the protest on the country’s political participation.

“Who are the people that turn up the votes every election season?” Agarau Idowu asked rhetorically. Idowu is the spokesperson for PDP Gubernatorial Candidate for Lagos State, Olajide Oladiran, popularly known as JANDOR. He answered, “the grassroots”. Idowu stressed further that as politicians, it doesn’t matter if they are old or young. He noted that the political strategy to win elections in recent times should be in three phases; the grassroots, the youth, and women.

Idowu told the audience the preparations for the 2027 election must start immediately after the 2023 polls.

He stated that we must begin asking relevant questions, “should we prioritise independent candidates?” “Do we need electronic voting?” On electronic voting, Idowu added that electronic voting would take our electoral system to “Eldorado”.

Ezekwesili interjected, “Electronic voting is not rig proof; we’ve seen the data all over the world, and electronic voting is one of the ways to rig the election”.

Speaking on the political structure needed to win elections, Yesufu said, “the people are the structure, not the buildings”. She added further, “Nigerians need more active citizens, not activists”. She elaborated further that all Nigerians who deliver good governance should run for office. The change we desire can only be affected when we participate in governance activities.

Explaining the term “structure”, Yesufu said, “we are the structure”. She stressed that when everybody leaves the internet, we become the grassroots. She explained the adverse effects of vote buying on the average Nigerian and why everybody in the society must educate each other on the best practices of elections and the danger of electoral malpractice. She pressed further, “we have more elites paying attention now” the elites - the people with education and high volume

“Democracy without education is a disaster,” she said. Many people do not know the relationship between the choices they make during elections and their future. Yesufu noted that we must enlighten such people and awaken them to the intricacies of governance.

Yesufu also told the audience that structure encapsulates money; she termed it “money structure”. For a political agenda to be achieved, money is needed for mobilisation. She underscored the importance of finance on an individual’s political ambition. Since politics is different from business, securing funding could be difficult, hence why Yesufu tasked the audience to always support the candidate they believe in financially.

On increased young voters’ registration, Adenike Oriowo affirmed that young people have come out to register. However, she asked, “will these young people come out to vote?”. Even though the increased registration and participation on social media denotes “an awakening”, will “millions of Twitter followers translate to votes?”.

Oriowo stressed further that despite the increased registration, people are not coming to get their voter’s card, a scenario that might hamper voters’ turnout in the next election. “We made efforts to tell people that their cards are available and they should come and get their voters’ card, but they end up asking if the commission can send or post the card. Ezekwesili interjected, “Can you?”. She replied, “We can’t”. Sandra asked, “Why not?” Oriowo said the law doesn’t permit that.

On the issue of PVC collection, Aisha Yesufu explained that the poor collection of PVCs results from a lack of trust in the electoral process. She said, “there is a lie people tell, “votes don’t count”, but we ask them, “why do politicians pay for votes if they don’t count.?” She also stressed that poor electoral education is also responsible for voter’s apathy.

Akide stressed that the citizen’s perception of the electoral body had affected the trust in INEC. However, she maintained that INEC must be compelled to deliver its mandate - a free and fair election - to the people in 2023.

Ezekwesili asked Oriowo about the allegations of people of specific demographic/ethnic groups being denied their PVCs in Lagos. Oriowo asked that complaints must be lodged for INEC to take action. She assured the audience that such officials would be dealt with if caught.

Idowu had raised an issue on the bloated INEC’s register. Citing a drop in Rivers State votes, Idowu called INEC to resolve the cases of invalid voter’s cards.

Attendees at the event asked pertinent questions, to which the panellists responded.

Oriowo responded to the question on security at the polling units; she started by saying that the INEC has a committee on security matters during elections, they are called Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES). The committee is empowered with the task of security pre-election, during the election, and post-election. Further, she mentioned the need to be acquainted with the laws and rules guiding elections in Nigeria.

Responding to the allegations of a bloated voters register, Oriowo stressed the importance of an informed citizenry. She informed the audience about a provision termed “claims and objections”, a condition that allows citizens to object to PVC registrations that seem suspicious or invalid. She believed the society and local communities could serve as watchdogs in helping the INEC to remove invalid voter’s cards. She cited examples of the citizens informing the electoral body of underage voters, dead persons etc. She urged the audience to be actively involved in the country’s activities.

Ezekwesili rounded off the session with a profound warning, “If you don’t vote, whoever emerges the winner is who you voted for”.





Third Panel Session: Let Us Imagine Nigeria: A New Blueprint for the Future

Stating that innovation will chart the course of a new Nigeria and Africa is obvious and maybe a cliché. Nigeria stays a nation of incredible potential. Her wellspring of conceivable possibilities can be tracked in its developing educated, and emerging technology-driven sector. At this very moment in the country's history, the educated population is at the threshold or point of national acceleration.

A perfect example is the nation's growing tech environment, driven by young people. It is similar to the Asian Tigers before their quick change to a developed world and high-income status. Although all the fundamentals indicate a country is at the point of a great leap forward, the role of an enlightened and well-educated population is crucial to that process. In Africa, the Nigerian tech space was the most attractive for investors in 2021. Of the \$4.2 billion secured in Africa, \$1.7 billion went to Nigeria startups.

For Nigeria we desire a Nigeria where everything works, the development of the country should not be restricted to technological innovations only, lest we make the error of being overly dependent on a sector. Experts see a lot of opportunities and advantages in environmental innovations; at the fore is the Green economy. The green economy is low carbon, resource and socially inclusive; it holds the potential to drive employment and massive economic growth. Is the country ready to harness these enormous opportunities available from technology to the environment? How do we consolidate the country's gains so far and fuse them with innovations and wheels of development? Where are we as a nation, and what are the possibilities we hold in the future as a nation? Is Nigeria on the road to taking its rightful position as the indisputable Giant of Africa again?

Panellists:

Somkele Awa-Kalu, Special Assistant to the President on Economic Research and Analytics
Titilola Akinsola, Legal Practitioner and Managing Partner, Grace Crest Attorney.

Moderator

Hero Daniels



RESPONSES:

Session moderator, Hero Daniels, started the conversation by throwing a poster out to the audience, “What comes to your mind when you think of a new Nigeria?”. The audience chorused “good roads”, “security”, “good education”, and “job opportunities”. Daniels contrasted the electricity situation in Nigeria with South Africa using his trip to the latter.

In his opening address, Daniels alluded to the country’s tech space. He noted that replicating the progress in our tech space in other sectors would lead to overall development.

Daniels opened the session with a question to Titilola Akinsola, “What is the Nigerian dream?”. Using the panel’s topic, Akinsola said, “the Nigerian dream, Imagine Nigeria presents a Nigeria we can call home”. Akinsola established that no matter our sojourn, exploits and achievement elsewhere, there is no place like home. She referenced the Russia and Ukraine conflict. She said the Nigerian people had to come back home following the conflict in the region. She envisioned the ‘Nigerian dream’ as a place where we can get everything we desire - education, health, security, profit and prosperity.

Daniels directed his question to the second person on the panel, Somkele Awa-Kalu. “What should the Nigerian dream be?” Awa-Kalu said, “I can’t tell you what the Nigerian dream should be”. He stressed further that, however, we could chart a new course for our country. It is the time to start a conversation, not a proposition. “If we are to go round here, we will get

5,000 versions of the Nigerian dream”. He stated that the most pertinent thing right now is starting a national conversation on what the Nigerian dream should be.

Awa-Kalu stressed the need for a pantheon of national relevance. He drew a connection with the exploits and ideals of Abraham Lincoln and how it connects the average American to the ethos of their founding fathers. He said, “it will be difficult to ask me what the Nigerian dream is; rather, we can craft a national narrative”.

Responding to Daniels’ question on how the wrong perception affects the Nigerian narrative, Awa-Kalu said, “We are what we say of ourselves”. Awa-Kalu noted a trust deficit between the people and the government. However, we must do away with the “us vs them” narrative in governance. Although some people steal and make citizens uncomfortable, officials are working hard to realise a perfect Nigeria.

Awa-Kalu established, “Government is not a monolith; government is not intangible”. The people must start trusting each other across the divides to make Nigeria what we desire.

On migration, Awa-Kalu noted that Japa is not necessarily bad. As people migrate, they contribute to their home country’s economy through “remittances”. When we spin narratives, we must always emphasise the positive side, he added.

Awa-Kalu told the audience one of the significant recommendations of the 'Imagine Nigeria' report is the culture of innovation. We must make innovation a national agenda that we must all deliberate upon.

On policies supporting innovation, Akinsola noted that when policies are passed, they go through many processes, and the people need to participate in

these policies as they affect them. She referenced that people were invested in the Petroleum Industry Bill and Electoral bill, and such investments can be replicated across bills. The people should be at the crux of policy formulations; they must participate actively, Akinsola concluded.



Conclusion

The relationship between people, politics and power can be a complex one. But the way to understand it is by examining the power dynamics of each element: people, politics, and power.

On the one hand, it's easy to see how people can be manipulated by powerful figures who know how to use their positions of power to get what they want. On the other hand, it's also easy to see how the laws of their society constrain those influential figures

In the end, it's like we need both sides of this equation: a population that is aware - with or without social media - of what's happening in their world and can use that knowledge to make changes for the better; and leaders who understand the limits of their power and are willing to use that knowledge responsibly.





About The Future Project

The Future Project is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to build a network of empowered citizens – through active citizenship, jobs, entrepreneurship and civic engagement with a vision to inspire a generation of equipped leaders committed to social and economic development in Africa.

About YMonitor

YMonitor accountability project is an initiative under The Future Project (TFP), a developmental organisation dedicated to building a network of empowered citizens – through jobs, entrepreneurship and active citizenship.

Founded in 2016, YMonitor highlights crucial accountability issues at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels. Through our Accountability Projects, as well as online and offline activities, YMonitor has effectively monitored, tracked, and provided helpful information to public members on issues crucial to governance in the last six years.

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