

CROSSROADS



**Integrity,
Inclusion,
Empowerment...**

**THE 2023
ELECTIONS**



Mary Beth Leonard
U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria

Welcome to another edition of Crossroads.

Elections are a critical part of the democratic process – they are our chance to choose the leaders who we

think can address society's needs and lead us into the future. In this special Crossroads edition, we focus on the upcoming general elections across Nigeria, which will select continued or new leadership at the local, state, and national levels. We offer perspectives on inclusivity, including of women and persons with disabilities, in the electoral process. We discuss election integrity and the challenge of fake news. These are areas where the U.S. Mission to Nigeria has worked hard to complement the efforts of Nigerian officials and Nigeria's lively news media. We also take a look at elections in my country, the United States, with a contribution from a Nigerian journalist who visited Washington, DC, and Atlanta, Georgia, to observe our November 2022 midterm elections.

In other bilateral news, we are pleased to share with you details about the Smithsonian's recent voluntary return of several Benin bronzes to Nigeria,

and how that is stimulating similar positive decisions by other U.S. and international museums. Also, we have updates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), describing Nigeria's progress against Covid-19 and HIV/AIDS, respectively.

Most recently, in December, President Biden hosted President Buhari and 44 other leaders at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington D.C. – you can read about their meeting and more.

Finally, I would like to note that this is our first digital-only edition of the magazine. Please be sure to subscribe by joining our mailing list, and please give us feedback on your experience reading Crossroads virtually. We'd really like to hear from you!

Please enjoy the read.

Mary Beth Leonard

CROSSROADS

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Inclusive Elections for All

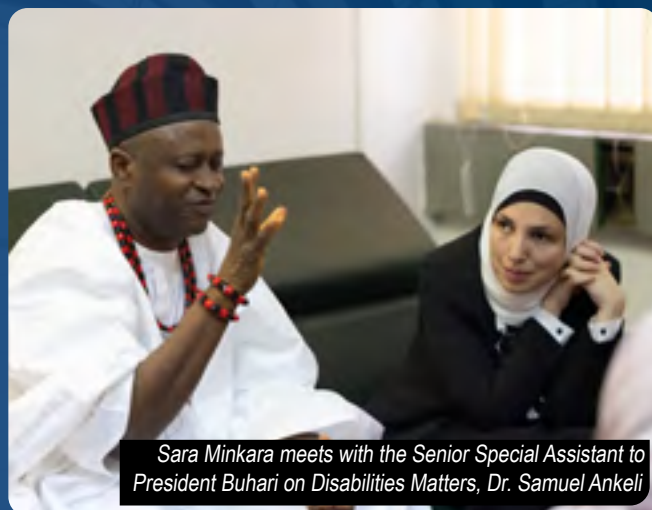
With Nigeria in the midst of campaign season and calls for greater inclusivity a recurrent theme in the media, Abuja received a timely visit on October 4-7 from President Biden's Special Advisor for International Disability Rights Sara Minkara (SAIDR) and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Lisa Peterson. The two U.S. officials met with Nigerian government officials, civil society organizations, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, women activists, and persons with disabilities. Both Minkara (who is herself visually impaired) and Peterson spoke of the need to not just take incremental steps to accommodate individual disabilities, but to go much further, focusing on inclusivity as an issue that impacts on everyone.



SAIDR Sara Minkara (fourth from left) and Acting Assistant Secretary Lisa Peterson (third from left) meet with Nigerian civil society groups advocating for greater inclusion for Persons with Disabilities



Sara Minkara, Lisa Peterson, and Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard (second left) meet with Minister of Labour and Employment Dr. Chris Ngige to discuss employment issues faced by Persons with Disabilities



Sara Minkara meets with the Senior Special Assistant to President Buhari on Disabilities Matters, Dr. Samuel Ankele



Lisa Peterson receives a token from Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Mahmood Yakubu



Sara Minkara (third from left), Lisa Peterson (third from right), and other U.S. government officials meet with Chairman of INEC, Mahmood Yakubu (center) and other INEC officials



Washington Summit Deepens U.S. Partnerships with African Democracies

By Robert Gabor
U.S. Embassy Press Attaché

President Joseph Biden hosted 45 African heads of state and the head of the African Union in Washington, D.C. for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit (U.S.-ALS) from December 13-15. The historic summit expanded vital political, economic, and strategic partnerships, as well as people-to-people dialogue, based on mutual interests and shared values in Africa.

President Biden invited President Buhari, along with four other African leaders whose countries will hold elections in 2023, to a discussion on the challenges of fostering responsible and peaceful transfers of power. All participants reaffirmed their commitment to free, fair, and transparent elections conducted by competent, independent, and impartial national electoral bodies, as stipulated in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance.

President Buhari spoke inspiringly about clean energy and regional security. His public remarks reflected the spirit of the Summit – the belief that robust U.S.-African partnerships are vital to improving health systems, creating economic opportunity, addressing the climate crisis, expanding energy access, revitalizing democracies, and strengthening the international order.

U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Mary Beth Leonard noted that the summit helped deepen U.S.-Nigeria bilateral ties on multiple levels. “We appreciated not only the Nigerian government’s robust participation in the summit, but also hearing the views of stakeholders in Nigeria’s promising future, including independent voices from the private sector, civil society, young people, women, and all those who are working to build a strong and inclusive democracy.”

More broadly, the summit allowed the U.S. government and the American people to publicly express their profound interest in engaging with Africans on multiple levels. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted during his trip to Nigeria in 2021, Africa’s demographic growth and economic potential will shape not just the future of its people, it will also shape the world.

For more information about U.S. priorities in working with Nigeria and other partners in Africa, I urge you all to read the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/U.S.-Strategy-Toward-Sub-Saharan-Africa-FINAL.pdf>



Tony Elumelu, Nigerian economist, philanthropist and founder of The Tony Elumelu Foundation, delivers remarks at a reception for African innovators



U.S. President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken meet Leaders of African countries preparing for National elections



U.S. President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken participate in the U.S.-Africa Summit Leaders Session on partnering on the African Union's Agenda 2063 in Washington, D.C.



Secretary Blinken congratulates Innovation First Place Winner - Healthbotics Limited of Nigeria at a reception for African innovators



U.S. President Joe Biden receives Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in the Oval office

Promoting Electoral Integrity in Nigeria

The Prospects and the Challenges



The following are excerpts from a November 17, 2022 speech in Abuja by U.S. Embassy Political Counselor Rolf Olson, addressing distinguished alumni of the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship Program.

National elections are coming in Nigeria in a few weeks' time. In my country, we too have had recent elections, a mid-term election that resulted in a new Congress and at least eight Americans of Nigerian descent getting elected to various state government positions.

Let me preface my comments by stating one very important point: The United States does not support any individual candidate or party in Nigeria's election cycle (or for that matter, in any other upcoming election). Our interest is in supporting credible and transparent elections that reflect the will of Nigerian voters, in a process that is conducted peacefully. Full stop.

It is appropriate to recognize how quickly and effectively Nigeria has become a democracy. In just 23 years since democracy was restored, Nigeria has successfully reached and passed several major milestones. For example, term limits at all levels of government have become a routine part of Nigeria's governing structure, without any fuss or controversy. They help ensure a fundamental characteristic of successful democracies: the regular rotation of power.

There are other reasons to be hopeful about the elections in February and March. One is the enactment earlier this year of the Electoral Act Amendment Law. We commend the National Assembly for having passed it and President Buhari for having signed it. As politicians and civil society organizations across the spectrum have noted, this new law helps enshrine a number of important steps in ensuring that elections in Nigeria genuinely reflect the will of the people.

Two features of Nigeria's current electoral system constitute significant steps forward technologically. First is the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System, or "BVAS" which confirms that the individual standing at the polling unit attempting to vote is who they

say they are. The second feature will protect the integrity of the electronic transmission of results from individual polling stations. This kind of photo image-based system will help ensure that the announced results reflect the actual results as recorded on voting results sheets.

But these legal and technical developments alone cannot ensure a successful election. It is also essential that candidates and their parties and supporters refrain from brash predictions of victory that suggest defeat is only possible if there is fraud. There is no true democratic election in which the outcome is foretold.

Before I became a diplomat I used to work in American politics in Washington, and I have witnessed numerous elections in which a particular candidate seemed certain to win, based on some combination of various factors – a majority of voters of the same party in the district, city, or state; polling data that appeared to show a very large, insurmountable lead over the opponent; or the fact that the candidate was the incumbent, who had been elected to that same office, possibly several times. But in some cases, the very unexpected happens.

That is democracy. Candidates and parties that seek to run for public office must accept one fundamental truth – losing is always possible. If you are not willing to accept the possibility that you might be defeated, then you should not be running for office in the first place.

That is why we in the U.S. Embassy look to all Nigerians to reject the use of violence and inflammatory rhetoric before, during, and after election day. When we say "all" Nigerians we mean all: politicians, candidates, students, leaders of religious, traditional, community, youth, and business organizations and entities – everyone has a role to play in this effort.

Ultimately the success of the 2023 elections will depend on people, especially the million-plus Nigerians who will be actively engaged in facilitating or carrying out the elections. We look forward to a successful, peaceful process that reflects the will of the Nigerian people.

American Museums Lead the Way in Returning Benin Bronzes



By Julia McKay
& Blessing Abbah

On October 11, 2022, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art and the National Gallery of Art hosted a historic event in Washington, D.C. which no doubt touched the hearts of millions not only in Nigeria but across Africa and the world. On that day, and in the presence of dozens of Nigerian and American officials, media, and historic preservation stakeholders, the United States celebrated a signing agreement that transferred ownership of 29 Benin bronzes formerly with the Smithsonian to the government and people of Nigeria. Just nine days later, on October 20, the agreement was put into action as personnel from the National Commission for Museum and Monuments (NCMM) received crates carrying a total of 22 Benin Bronzes at Abuja airport, and we were thrilled to be on hand to capture the moment.

Of the 22 priceless works of art that have so far been shipped to Nigeria, 20 came from the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, one from the National Gallery of Art, and one from

the Rhode Island School of Design. My mutual agreement, nine of the bronzes whose ownership has been transferred to Nigeria will remain in Washington, D.C. on loan to the National Gallery of Art.

The official transfer of ownership comes less than a year after the January 2022 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of Nigeria and the United States in Abuja, which provides an umbrella for collaborative efforts to take place in order to stem illegal or undocumented exports and protect Nigeria's cultural property. While presenting the Benin bronzes on October 11, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Lonnie Bunch said, "Not only was returning ownership of these magnificent artifacts to their rightful home the right thing to do, but it also demonstrates how we all benefit from cultural institutions making ethical choices."

Recent decisions by other countries and museums to begin returning some artifacts in their possession to Nigeria

and other West African nations reflect the importance of the United States taking the first step.

Looking ahead, the return of these Benin Bronzes presents new opportunities for Nigeria and the U.S. to collaborate on a deeper and broader level by encouraging public and private cultural institution partnerships and further promoting joint exhibitions. Such collaboration may include museum staff capacity-building, the exchange of cultural materials for scientific, cultural, and educational purposes, and long-term loans of such materials to augment American and international public awareness of Nigeria's cultural traditions. Protecting, preserving and publicizing Africa's rich history, cultural diversity, and artistic achievements is a goal that resonates with Americans from every age and background, and our Embassy is committed to it.

Julia McKay is the U.S. Mission Cultural Affairs Officer and Blessing Abbah is a Cultural Affairs Assistant. Both work of the U.S. Embassy in Abuja.

Ensuring Quality, Ethics and Entegrity in Media Reporting

By Aishah Gambari



Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard delivers opening remarks and addresses participants of the workshop in Abuja



Standing from left: Jeanne Clark, former Press Attaché, US Embassy, Abuja; Tony Akiotu, MD/CEO, DAAR Communications; David Mark, Editor, Washington Examiner and Lead Trainer; Mustapha Isa, President, Nigeria Guild of Editors; Festus Okoye, National Commissioner for Information and Voter Education, INEC and other members of the Nigerian Guild of Editors at the training session in Abuja

Uncovering Truth, Reporters Are Integral to a Vibrant Democracy

By Adejumobi Adegbite

Good reporters know they exercise huge responsibility when they cover elections and electoral processes. Getting the facts right is a duty to society, and requires both integrity and training. To ensure greater precision and accuracy in reporting, my colleagues and I in the Public Affairs Section of U.S. Consulate Lagos were delighted to organize workshops in four southern cities recently in partnership with the West Africa Broadcast and Media Academy (WABMA).

Our training in Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Enugu had two key components: a political journalism workshop focusing on writing for 100 reporters and political editors from radio, TV, newspapers, and online media; and a second workshop for 50 photojournalists and video journalists interested in innovative visual election-related storytelling.

At a workshop opening ceremony at the American Corner in Ibadan, U.S. Consul General Will Stevens lauded participants for being an integral part of a vibrant democracy and wanting to uncover truth, check abuse and demand transparency through their reporting. He noted the need for journalists to establish reliable fact-checking procedures that can verify the authenticity of sources and photos, and that can identify online sites that are untrustworthy.

"Practical training... offered in this workshop can help reduce the spread of misinformation"

As part of the U.S. Mission Nigeria's activities to promote press freedom and independence, I was pleased to join our Embassy's Press Unit to help fund and organize capacity building workshops recently for editors in Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Yola, Port Harcourt and Enugu.

The three-day event in each city for 350 members of the Editors' Guild started with Town Hall meetings where stakeholders -- including labor unions, pro-media rights organizations, senior lawyers, faith groups, students, and civil society groups -- traded ideas and concerns on how best to safeguard democracy and ensure quality, ethics and integrity in media reporting.

United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Mary Beth Leonard, and former U.S. Embassy Press Attache Jeanne Clark spoke to Town Hall participants and urged them to counter propaganda and disinformation through rigorous, unbiased fact-checking. Ambassador Leonard noted: "Our hope is that this forum will lead to serve to further discussions on media literacy, building solutions, and contributing to a democracy that is accountable to its people. Democracy's greatest strength is its ability to improve upon and reinvent itself. When citizens believe in democracy, they will want to be a part of that system and will defend it."

David Mark, a seasoned American political journalist, was the lead trainer. An editor with the Washington Examiner, Mr. Mark presented a

comparative analysis of the U.S. and Nigerian elections and why journalists have to remain objective in election reporting.

Participants agreed that the Nigeria Guild of Editors should set up a media monitoring platform to assess media reporting of the process. They also agreed to create a forum for engagement with political party leaders and administrators, candidates, election managers, security agencies, civil society leaders and the Nigerian public for insights on their preparations and to assess how processes to faithfully report their activities are evolving.

Aishah Gambari is the Public Affairs Section Information Specialist of the U.S. Embassy, Abuja

US Consul General, Will Stevens and Joe Kruzich of the U.S. Consulate General, Lagos with panelists at the workshop



"Practical training helps reduce the spread of misinformation in the build-up to the upcoming election," CG Stevens said. He highlighted the U.S. government's commitment to freedom of the press, and to initiatives that empower journalists with skills on election reporting, noting journalists play an indispensable role in ensuring a free and fair democratic electoral process.

For years, the U.S. Mission has promoted programs and exchanges for hundreds of Nigerian journalists on topics ranging from fact checking, ethics, and investigative reporting to specialized coverage of health, defense and national security issues. 2023 will be no different.

Adejumobi Adegbite is the Public Affairs Section Information Assistant of the U.S. Consulate General, Lagos



Workshop participants during the Lagos sessions

FEATURE

TOWARDS GENDER PARITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

By Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard



"We will continue to support Persons with Disabilities and other marginalized groups to participate in the polity and in governance."

As the U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a leader, and a woman, gender equality and women's empowerment are causes that are near and dear to me. They are also priorities for the U.S. government at home and around the world.

Unfortunately, women's participation in politics remains far lower than it should be. Nigerian women and girls often face greater barriers in politics, peace building, and governance. They may be reluctant to speak up, or they are quickly shut down when they do raise their voices. The result is that their viewpoints are often not reflected in important decision making. The United States is not immune to this.

Nigeria's representation of women in state and national government stands at only 4.5 percent in elective office at the state and national level according to the Women Trust Fund. The 2023 elections are a key turning point for women to vote, run for office, join a campaign or serve in the next administration. This campaign season presents an opportunity to demand that candidates prioritize policies and legislation that benefit everyone, including women and girls.

One of the reasons why women may not choose to run for office is the fear of violence. During the Kogi gubernatorial elections in 2019, for example, an opposition party woman leader was burnt alive in her house. To mitigate the dangers faced by women candidates, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting a campaign called "Stop Violence Against Women in Politics." The campaign, part of our Sustaining

Electoral Engagement for Democracy activities, tracks, documents, and responds to incidents of violence against women in politics and during elections. The campaign also includes a component to strengthen the capacity of women groups, advocating for laws and policies that provide better protection for women.

The U.S. Mission to Nigeria also promotes an enabling environment for women's economic success, and we address structural and social challenges that hold women back, empowering women through programs that leverage their skills and realize their full potential. Across the world, nations that have gender parity achieve greater economic and developmental growth, and have higher rates of literacy than nations that do not empower women. Fundamentally, we see it as our duty – and the world's duty – to seek a just and equitable society – one that ensures women and girls have real opportunities to not just participate, but also to lead.

As Nigeria pursues a more inclusive political landscape, my U.S. Mission, through USAID programs, is equalizing access to health care, agriculture, education, economic empowerment, political participation, and peacebuilding. USAID is strengthening multi-sectoral partnerships and collaborating with the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Primary Health Care Development Agency to help implement gender-based policies and regulations.

Legal reforms will be a key step. We look forward to the implementation of the Child Rights Act and the Violence

Against Persons Prohibition Act at the state level. With new guidelines and data, local non-governmental organizations and traditional institutions can help end harmful norms and practices and institute referral linkages between communities, health facilities, and government parastatals. The localized work will be by Nigerians, for Nigerians.

Inclusivity applies equally to those who are disabled. We will continue to support Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and other marginalized groups to participate in government and governance. Unfortunately, many PWDs are often ignored or excluded from social, economic, and political affairs. We strongly support the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act which President Buhari signed into law on January 23, 2019. Through its Sustaining Electoral Engagement for Democracy (SEED) activities, USAID supported the Access Nigeria campaign, which advocates for the inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria's electoral process.

There is hope ahead as we await the results of the Nigerian Presidential Elections. We share the same goals as the Government of Nigeria's strategy to support women, and the U.S. will continue to focus on women's economic empowerment and greater income equality among genders. Human-centered policies boost productivity and can bring real change to the lives of women. The U.S. government will continue to strongly support Nigeria's economic prosperity and well-being, in partnership with the Nigerian government, businesses, and civil society.

OVERCOMING ELECTION-RELATED Misinformation & Disinformation

By Robert Gabor

The following are excerpts from a September 6, 2022 speech that U.S. Embassy Press Attaché Robert Gabor delivered at a Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition Conference on "Curbing Information Disorder."

The United States and Nigeria are both large and diverse democracies, with open media debate and active public participation in all aspects of civic life. Thus, it is not surprising that our countries face common challenges, including the challenge that disinformation and misinformation pose to our institutions and public discourse. Modern communications technology networks people together, but that same technology



also enables and allows online and traditional media to advance erroneous news, disinformation and misinformation.

President Biden spoke about this challenge in his January 2021 inaugural address to the American people, warning: "There is truth and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders [...] to defend the truth and to defeat the lies."

While President Biden was referring in his speech to recent events in American politics, all citizens of democracies, including Nigerians, have the duty and responsibility to promote truth in reporting. Nigeria's wide-open media environment, the upcoming national election, and its growing security concerns have created, unfortunately, fertile ground for the spread of disinformation.

The U.S. Mission in Nigeria is supporting Nigerian efforts to address this challenge in the lead up to the 2023 elections. We collaborated with the West Africa Broadcast and Media Academy and the Enugu literacy Society to launch "Project Fact Check Nigeria," to train more than 170 radio hosts, producers, and reporters on fact-checking. Over a six-month span, we also partnered with the Nigeria Guild of

Editors by inviting U.S. media experts and facilitating town hall meetings and workshops in six cities -- Lagos, Kano, Yola, Abuja, Enugu, and Port Harcourt. We also engaged with journalists, content creators, and activists from Yobe, Borno, Adamawa, Zamfara and Katsina on how to identify, investigate, and report misinformation.

**"each of us
has a duty and
responsibility... to
defend the truth
and to defeat the
lies."**

While some cynics claim we live in a "post-fact world," research and practice demonstrate that this is a myth. Several large studies by universities across the world have found that, when misled audiences are provided with facts that correct the record, those same audiences have, more often than not, changed their views. The take-away from such studies is that, while people like to feel they are right, they do not like to be manipulated -- they want the truth. You, the members of the Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition, are committed to that end. We commend your work and look forward to further collaboration with you in the future.

The 2022 U.S. Mid-Term Elections: The Lessons For Nigeria

By Alex Ogbodo



Alex Ogbodo of Dream FM Enugu speaks with Nick Jacobs, Information Officer, Washington DC Board of Elections

The recent mid-term elections in November 2022 offered American voters another opportunity to choose their elected officials for the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives, governorships, and city and district elections.

For someone like me who benefited from a firsthand feel and on-the-ground view of the way Americans prosecute their elections, I deduced a number of lessons from the process.

U.S. politicians campaign as though their lives depend on it. Even before candidates emerge as nominees from their own political party, they go through a grueling debating process. The candidates I interviewed from Washington DC to Maryland to Georgia all showed how ready they all were for political office because of the way they managed and overcame the

tough hurdles they faced during the process out of which they just emerged.

A second lesson learned was that campaigns are issue-based. The American electorate always looks out for candidates who are talking about their needs and concerns, like the economy, inflation, jobs, abortion rights etc. Even though candidates can lose elections for other reasons, most win or lose depending on where they stand on certain issues and if they are consistent.

A third thing I noticed is that U.S. former presidents are not apolitical. It was fascinating to see former presidents Clinton, Obama and Trump campaigning for their party's candidates. In Nigeria former presidents appear to be apolitical for reasons that may be political. Their seeming indifference to the platforms that made them presidents is less than gratifying.

Politicians being able to campaign on Election Day is also very exciting, as this might afford candidates a last-minute opportunity to sway undecided voters. But here in Nigeria it is against the law, as campaigns must cease 24 hours before polling opens. It will be interesting to see if Nigeria will ever consider Election Day campaigning.

The early voting process and the mail-in votes system are innovative, showcasing the efficiency of the American postal system. The ease of voting early brings to the fore how the process is structured to audit itself.

Having personally seen firsthand the intricate but efficient American electoral system, I think Nigeria could be the biggest winner if it considers the potential gains that can be made.

Alex Ogbodo is Head of News and Lead Political Anchor, Dream FM Enugu



Alex Ogbodo and Clement Ohenzuwa of AIT interview report from Montgomery County, Maryland at the early voting center



Alex reporting from Fulton County, Georgia during an election press briefing

STRENGTHENING NIGERIA'S PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

By Halilu Usman and
Victoria Carter



U.S. Consul General Will Stevens and U.S. CDC Country Director Dr. Mary Boyd with PHEM PC graduates in September 2022

As COVID-19 continues to impact communities across the country, Nigerians also face ongoing threats to public health posed by diseases like mpox, Ebola, and cholera. Effective public health emergency preparedness and response are critical to protecting the country's well-being and future.

"The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates now more than ever the importance of ensuring public health systems can adequately detect, prevent, respond to, and recover from health emergencies, particularly those whose scale, timing, or unpredictability threatens to overwhelm routine capabilities" said Dr. Mary Boyd, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Nigeria Country Director.

In response to the growing need for trained public health response staff, the CDC team collaborated with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control to host Nigeria's second Public Health Emergency Management Professional Certification Program (PHEM PC) in Lagos in September 2022. PHEM PC is part of the U.S. Government's support for pandemic preparedness in Nigeria and around the world. It provides emergency managers, incident managers, state epidemiologists, first responders, watch managers, and other public health experts with specialized training in public health emergency management and operations and builds skills in crisis and emergency risk communication.

Speaking to the 25 state epidemiologists graduating from the two-week, intermediate level certificate program,

U.S. Consul General Will Stevens said "The U.S. Government is committed to promoting the health and wellbeing of Nigerians through initiatives and training that increase disease prevention, detection, and response." He underscored the U.S. Government's prioritization of public health emergency management as Nigeria works towards Global Health Security Agenda 2024 goals and strengthens emergency response, workforce development, disease surveillance, and laboratory capacity.

With each graduating class, PHEM PC helps build workforce capacity across Nigeria, thereby preventing illness and saving lives.

Halilu Usman and Victoria Carter are the CDC Nigeria Communication Specialist and Senior Advisor for Policy, Partnerships, and Communication respectively.

Alumni Seminar Examines How Youth Can Defend Democracy

By Timi Olagunju



2015 MWF alumnus Timi Olagunju representing Nigeria at the Alumni Thematic International Exchange Seminars (Alumni TIES) last November

November 13, 2022 was a memorable day for me. That day, I arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, along with several other Mandela Washington Fellowship alumni from Africa, to attend a very timely #AlumniTIES event entitled ‘Youth and Opportunity: Defending Democracy and Advancing Human Rights.’

During the Program, there was a session on Defending Democracy Together, and our collective capacity to, first, identify gaps in democracy and then, to find country-specific ways to fill those gaps by leveraging partnerships. Our group discussed how young people can engage in governance and participate in the political and decision-making processes. This session was very instructive for me, as it spoke to my work in the civic and human

rights space, and how it intersects with my earlier attempt to run for a Federal House of Representative seat in Ibadan North in the 2019 elections. The sharing of experiences during this panel also helped me envision additional programmatic ideas for the Youth in Motion Fellowship which I oversee to help young activists begin to play a role in policy-influencing and governance across Africa.

I enjoyed interacting with Andrew Goretsky of the Anti-Defamation League of Philadelphia who spoke about his life-long work tracking and tackling disinformation, misinformation, hate speech and rhetoric. I found the League’s work extremely useful, as we need similar tools and strategies for tackling disinformation and misinformation as Nigeria’s election draws near.

The AlumniTIES seminar featured sessions on digital democracy, especially how technological advances combine with underlying social, economic, and political conditions to produce new platforms for democratic engagement. I was struck by Stanford University’s projects and the plethora of evidence-based research that relates to decoding digital democracy in Africa.

Our seminar included exchange alumni from 43 countries. I was impressed by the satiric and impactful work of Adil Zakenov, founder of ‘Le Shapalaque Comics.’ He uses simple cartoons and animation to drive citizen-focused messages on democratic events and culture in Kazakhstan. I enjoyed interacting with him and with all the international alumni who attended.

Nigerian-Americans

REPRESENTING

By Ola Aworinde. Editor, Crossroads

It is not uncommon to hear the saying “Anywhere you go, you’re bound to find a Nigerian” and there are few places where this is more true than in the United States. These eight State Representatives were voted into office in the mid-term elections of November 8, 2022, across three states and they all have one thing in common... Their proud Nigerian heritage.



Carol Kazeem

Carol Kazeem was elected as a Pennsylvania State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Esther Agbaje

Esther Agbaje was re-elected as a Minnesota State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Gabe Okoye

Gabe Okoye was elected as a Georgia State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Oye Owolewa

Oye Owolewa was elected as the shadow representative of the United States House of Representatives from the District of Columbia. As a shadow congressperson, Owolewa is tasked with lobbying for D.C. statehood.



Phil Olaleye

Phil Olaleye was elected as a Georgia State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Segun Adeyina

Segun Adeyina was elected as a Georgia State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Solomon Adesanya

Solomon Adesanya was elected as a Georgia State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.



Tish Naghise

Tish Naghise was elected as a Georgia State Representative under the platform of the Democratic Party.

Cynthia's Story

From Thoughts of Suicide to Helping Other Mothers with HIV

By Naomi Oboyi and Dr. Yusuf Ahmed

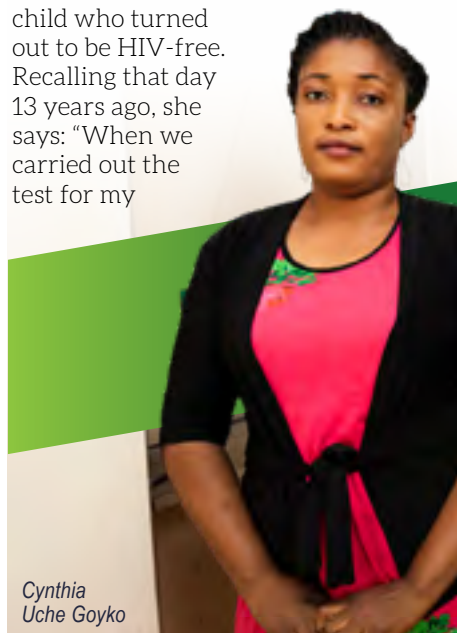
Cynthia Uche Goyko is a 37-year-old Preventing Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT) Mentor Mother in Nigeria who first learned of her HIV status in 2009 while receiving antenatal care for her first pregnancy at a private clinic.

Narrating her ordeal, Cynthia revealed that knowing her HIV status led her into depression, and she almost took her life. She said, "I just wanted to abort the pregnancy and end it all - I tried committing suicide." After much persuasion from her husband and the doctor over the course of five days, she finally agreed to visit a facility where she could access quality HIV care, the Defence Headquarters Medical Centre in Abuja. This marked a turning point in Cynthia's life.

At the facility, she was directed to the PMTCT Section, where she met dedicated counselors who provided compassionate care and support. Cynthia noted, "Apart from the treatment, they talked to me and counseled me on what I can do concerning my baby, how I'll be taking my drugs, how my baby will be protected. At first, I was so afraid, even when I visit the facility to get my antiretroviral drugs, I'll always be afraid of people seeing me and what they would say. When the counselor heard of my suicide attempts, she took her time to always visit me. She was very helpful and supportive."

Cynthia recovered from her depression and went on to give birth to her first

child who turned out to be HIV-free. Recalling that day 13 years ago, she says: "When we carried out the test for my



baby and it came out negative, I was so happy. That was the happiest day of my life."

Fast forward to the present, and Cynthia is now a proud mother of three HIV-free children and has also become a PMTCT Mentor Mother who counsels other HIV mothers. She shares her own initial ordeal and ultimately positive experience as a teaching and counseling tool.

On why she chose in 2017 to become a Mentor Mother, Cynthia says, "Most people were still trying to hide and cover themselves, but I reminded myself that this program has really helped me, I can also help other people instead of hiding."

Describing her success in persuading HIV-positive mothers to take life-saving, antiretroviral drugs, Cynthia notes, "I have become a major source of support for them. We meet and share our fears and I listen. They open up to me about their fears, things that they can't tell their own family members. They trust me and I always listen to them and provide support, the same way counselors helped me out during my suicide attempt. I tell them I have three kids, and all of them are HIV-free. I sometimes show them pictures of my kids so they can see how healthy they look. From there, they get encouraged to start taking their drugs."

Reflecting on how she has benefitted from her job, Cynthia notes, "I was so grateful for this opportunity. Being a mentor-mother has really improved my livelihood, I get paid every month, I have attended several training programs, I can even provide HIV Testing Services. I have attended PMTCT trainings, I have been trained in HTS counseling, I have even been trained in EID (Early Infant Diagnosis) testing which I had no plan of doing before. I have done so many other trainings and they have greatly improved my life and my career."

This 37-year-old woman is one of the many Nigerian mothers who have benefitted from the PMTCT program and its focus on helping women who are medically ill-informed, and feel somewhat confused and adrift. After visiting the clinic, they emerge more motivated, self-confident, and determined to live their best lives.

Naomi Oboyi is the Communications Specialist for the Walter Reed Program-Nigeria while Dr. Yusuf Ahmed is the Prevention Team Lead for the Walter Reed Program-Nigeria

PEPFAR or the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief is the largest effort by any nation to combat a single disease. Since inception in 2014, PEPFAR has prevented millions of Nigerians from being infected by HIV and dying from AIDS. PEPFAR has also helped to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS for vulnerable households and children, who, due to their socio-economic circumstances are at greater risk of HIV infection. Areas of support include, food and nutrition, protection, health, psychosocial, caregivers' practices, education and livelihood assistance among others. In 2018 alone, more than 1.2 million orphans and vulnerable children in Nigeria received care and support services under PEPFAR.

PEPFAR NIGERIA PROGRESS CARD 2022

An HIV Timeline

June 13, 2022

Amb. Dr. John N. Nkengasong was officially sworn in as U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Special Representative for Health Diplomacy (S/GAC).



September 22, 2022

Amb. Dr. John N. Nkengasong shared five strategic pillars and three enablers for reimagining PEPFAR

November 2, 2022

National HIV Alignment 2.0 was launched, as a continuation of Alignment 1.0; a commitment among Nigeria government, PEPFAR Nigeria, Global Fund and key players to unify resources and work, push for government ownership and sustainability.

5-Year Strategy

On December 1, 2022, PEPFAR released its five-year strategy to guide the United States' contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of ending the global AIDS pandemic as a public health threat by 2030. Its guide, Fulfilling America's Promise to End the HIV/AIDS Pandemic by 2030, focuses on five strategic pillars: support health equity for priority populations, sustaining the response, public health systems and security, transformative partnerships, and following the science; and is steered by three enablers: community leadership, innovation and leading with data.

World AIDS Day 2022

PUTTING OURSELVES TO THE TEST: ACHIEVING EQUITY TO END HIV

by Delmy Vasquez

December 1, 2022 marked another year of the ongoing fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Governments, private institutions, civil society, and individuals around the world continue to devote enormous time, effort and resources to provide those with HIV/AIDS access to treatment and care, as well as comprehensive access to HIV prevention. The U.S. Government, through PEPFAR and during nearly two decades of bipartisan Congressional support, has invested millions of dollars in the global HIV/AIDS fight. The total U.S. commitment to the global AIDS response has reached over \$100 billion, the largest by any nation to address a single disease in history.

In Nigeria, PEPFAR has disbursed over \$7 billion dollars' worth of assistance since 2004, and our efforts have yielded tangible results. The number of newly infected adults and children went down, for example, from over 200,000 annually in the mid-1990's to 110,000 in 2019 to 74,000 in 2021. Out of 1.9 million people living with HIV, 90% are currently receiving Antiretroviral Treatment (ART).

This year, we celebrate Nigeria's exceptional progress. Proving to be a regional leader in HIV/AIDS programming, Nigeria today is on the cusp of HIV epidemic control and is approaching the global "95-95-95" goals: 95% of people with HIV know their HIV status, 95% of those with diagnosed HIV infection are accessing ART, and 95% of those receiving ART have achieved an undetectable viral

load. All these achievements are possible due to the strong partnership among stakeholders, the engagement of civil society and the continuous involvement of beneficiaries.

The theme for this year's World Aids Day, "Putting Ourselves to the Test: Achieving Equity to End HIV", should be our guide as we move forward in this fight, putting our true effort into achieving the common goal of ending HIV/AIDS as a global health threat by 2030.

Achieving 95-95-95, not leaving anyone behind and ensuring that marginalized and disadvantaged individuals have access to HIV testing and diagnosis opportunities are all critical components of the effort. PEPFAR's work through its partners and beneficiaries provides a platform to erase barriers to quality HIV service access, fight against stigma and discrimination, gender-based violence, harmful policies, and discriminatory legislation that further marginalize individuals – including the LGBTQI+ community, people who use drugs, sex workers, racial and ethnic minorities, and women and girls – and threaten the human rights and dignity of all.

As current U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and PEPFAR chief Dr. John Nkengasong sums up: "We cannot be defeated by the HIV pandemic, we have to win this, we've invested so much, and we are beginning to project our eyes and to look at 2030."

Delmy Vasquez is an Administrative Assistant with PEPFAR Nigeria



U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission, David Greene takes part in World AIDS Day 2022 activities in Abuja

AMERICAN SPACES

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GRA, Bauchi

CALABAR

Cross River State IT Village
37 Ekpo Archibong Road
Calabar

IBADAN

Library and Resource Center,
Leventis Building
54, Magazine Road
Jericho, Ibadan

KANO

Kano State Library Board
Murtala Mohammad Library
Complex, Nasarawa, Kano

LAGOS

Victoria Island

29, Gafar Animashaun Street
(off Ajoye Adeogun St.)
Victoria Island, Lagos

Ikeja

Venture Garden Group
Compound, (Former Concord
Press, Near Toll Gate),
42 Local Airport Road, Ikeja,
Lagos

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Library, PMB 1069
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