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The Explainer

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Samoa Agreement: BEYOND RHETORICS

Omololu Ogunmade

Background

Until its transformation to Samoa Agreement on November 15, 2023, the treaty between European Union (EU) and African, Carribean and Pacific (ACP) countries had been christened Cotonou Agreement. The agreement was meant to serve as a new legal framework for EU's relations with ACP countries. The EU relations with ACP countries is not new. It has been in existence for decades. Hence, the treaty was previously known as Lome Convention, having been signed in Lome, the capital of Togo, a neighbouring African country, in 1975.

The Lome Convention was in force for 25 years, expiring in 2000, and was replaced with Cotonou Agreement. Signed on June 23, 2000 by 77 ACP countries and the existing 15 EU member states then, only Cuba of the 78 member states then failed to sign the Cotonou Agreement. The agreement was first reviewed in 2005, and later in 2010, and was billed to expire on February 29, 2020, but its lifespan was extended to November 30, 2023 because of the inability of member states to come up with a new agreement as scheduled. Eventually, a new negotiation platform was opened in April 2021, thus culminating in the birth of Samoa Agreement on October 23, 2023. It formally came into force in January, 2024.

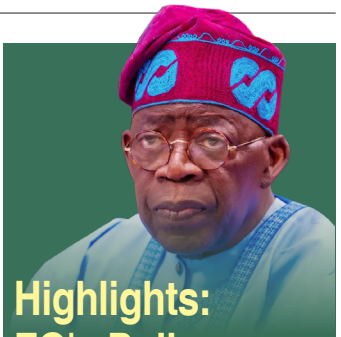
The Nitty-Gritty of Samoa Agreement

Signed by the current 27 EU member states and 79 ACP countries late last year, these countries constitute Organisation of African, Carribean and Pacific States (OACPS). Named Samoa Agreement because it was signed on the Island of Samoa in Oceania, it has six areas of priority, viz: human rights, democracy and good governance; peace and security; human and social development; inclusive sustainable economic growth and development; environmental sustainability and climate change as well as migration and mobility. The signing forum was the 46th session of ACP-EU Council of Ministers and the agreement focused only on global challenges with the lifespan of 20 years.



Obinna Onowu
Nigerian Ambassador to Belgium

Continue on page 3



Highlights: FG's Policy on Food Security

1. A 150-Day Duty-Free Import Window for Food Commodities

a. Suspension of duties, tariffs and taxes on the importation of certain food commodities (through land and sea borders);

b. These commodities include: maize, husked brown rice, wheat and cowpeas;

c. Under this arrangement, imported food commodities will be subjected to a recommended retail price (RRP);

2. In addition to the importation by private sector, Federal Government will import 250,000 metric tonnes of wheat and 250,000 metric tonnes of maize.;

3. Engage relevant stakeholders to set a guaranteed minimum price (GP) and mop ug surplus assorted food commodities to restock the National Strategic Food Reserve;

4. Continuous ramp-up production for the 2024/2025 farming cycle;

Sustained support to smallholder farmers in the ongoing wet season farming through existing government initiatives;

a. Strengthen and accelerate dry season farming across the country;

b. Embark on aggressive agricultural mechanisation and development to reduce drudgery, drive down the cost of production and boost productivity.

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As CLHEEAN Takes Centre Stage



Have you experienced the unexpected success of CLHEEAN, the new AI Virtual Voice/Chat Assistant of the National Orientation Agency? You can do so by visiting noa.gov.ng. It has already surpassed our expectations, becoming an exceptional communication tool from the very first day of its deployment.

The artificial intelligence tool is one of the many citizen engagement tools that NOA is deploying as we ramp up our capacity to deliver on our mandate. Two thousand Nigerians engaged CLHEEAN the first day it was posted on the agency's social media handles. The number rose above 6,000 on the second day. The number of those who engaged with CLHEEAN peaked at over 10,000 on day five. It is instructive to note that we have not formally unveiled the tool. After unveiling it in the coming week, this will be one communication tool that will be crucial in communicating government policies, programmes, and projects.

It was like when we deployed The Explainer e-newsletter; while some people acknowledged that the publication was a game changer, they opined that it was not capable of reaching most Nigerians. They were right. The Explainer was intended for some. If you are reading this, it was designed for you. However, the fact that The Explainer does not get to some people does not mean that NOA is not reaching them. Of course, we do. It is because The Explainer is just one of our many communication tools, each one expertly designed for a particular segment of the population based on studied media habits.

For instance, there are thousands of artisanal and trade associations across the 774 local governments whose members number in the millions. These are critical Nigerian stakeholders: the mechanics, tailors, cattle traders, barbers, bricklayers, carpenters, painters, welders, onion sellers, Okada and tricycle riders, yam and vegetable sellers, and several more. There are also the farmers, women, youths, civil society, and faith-based groups. Through our COMOs (Community Orientation and Mobilisation Officers), we have built a vast database of Nigerian categories from across the local governments. We are engaging and educating them on government policies and mobilising them on national values using town hall meetings, advocacy visits, and new media platforms, including direct messaging.

> **"In the coming weeks, NOA will deploy more communication vehicles, targeting different segments of the audience. Our strength lies in the enormous spread of our offices across the country and the fact that our members of staff are in the communities across the 774 local governments."**

In the coming weeks, NOA will deploy more communication vehicles, targeting different segments of the audience. Our strength lies in the enormous spread of our offices across the country and the fact that our members of staff are in the communities across the 774 local governments. If you have yet to hear or see our work, it will reach you as we continue to revive the hitherto near-comatose agency.

Lanre Issa-Onilu

A Season of Reforms

The last two weeks witnessed a lot of hot air and people crying wolf over the Samoa Agreement. Certain disgruntled few, including some media outfits, did their best to stir discontent among Nigerians. There was the wild allegation that the Federal government had signed an agreement that included a commitment to recognising LGBTQ. Of course, it was an orchestrated campaign targeted at creating chaos and making the government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu unpopular. It failed because it was not valid. You can read all you need to know about the Samoa Agreement in this edition. We cover all the grounds.

This edition includes the federal government's policy on food security, one of several steps the government is taking to alleviate the necessary reform pains. There is also a report on livestock reform. The President set up a livestock reform committee, which he serves as chairman. This is followed by the brave effort to mainstream the livestock sector as a vital contributor to the nation's economy and solve the agelong farmer-herder conflict that has impeded farming through a new Ministry of Livestock.

Nigerians are refusing to pay bribes, which is good to hear. A report shows that about 70 per cent of Nigerians resisted demands for bribes. We also see an upward movement of the external reserves. This edition's back page features Mr Bayo Onanuga's take on the Supreme Court's judgement granting financial autonomy and recognising the local government councils as the third tier of government.

This edition, like the previous ones, will spice up your weekend. You will surely enjoy it.

Samoa Agreement: Beyond Rhetorics

Continued from page 1

Nigeria signed the agreement on June 28, 2024. The Nigerian Ambassador to Belgium Kingdom, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the EU, Mr Obinna Onowu, signed it on behalf of the country. However, the supposed good intention of the government generated a huge controversy in the country as a result of the activities of revisionists, who twisted Article 9:2 of the Agreement on human rights, democracy and rule of law to imply the validation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) activities.

The section reads: "The Parties shall commit to the promotion of universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without discrimination based on any ground including sex, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, disability, age, or other status. They commit to fighting all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and all forms of violence and discrimination, including all instances of advocacy of hatred. They commit to the recognition and advancement of the rights of indigenous peoples, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)."

The revisionists, led by a regional daily, Daily Trust, twisted the above provision, misinterpreting the stipulation of human rights and fundamental freedom without discrimination as automatic imposition of LGBTQ rights on member states. The newspaper had an ally in a lawyer, Sonny Ekwowusi, who was the first to cry foul without interrogating the issues. However, several enlightened minds including the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Ministers of Information and National Orientation, Alhaji Mohammed Idris and his Budget and Economic Planning counterpart, Sen. Atiku Bagudu, had been swift to deplore the activities of these revisionists, stating in clear terms that nothing in the entire Samoa Agreement had any correlation with same sex marriage or bisexual, transgender and queer activities which had already been outlawed by Anti-same Sex Bill of 2014 signed by the then President Goodluck Jonathan.

When The Explainer perused the 172-page document, it found that all the provisions are not just good, but are also relevant to Nigeria's current realities with the potential to bring beneficial smiles to the search of Nigeria as a member state, if well implemented.

Some Provisions of Agreement

For the sake of clarity, some of these provisions, albeit unedited, are reproduced below:





Ambassador Obinna Onowu in Belgium flanked by officials of Nigerian High Commission and EU representative after signing the agreement

Article 9: 5: The Parties shall actively support the consolidation of the rule of law at national, regional and international levels, acknowledging its crucial importance for the protection of human rights and for the effective functioning of democratic institutions. That includes ensuring the existence of an independent, impartial and well-functioning judicial system, equality before the law, the right to a fair trial and due process and access to effective mechanisms of legal redress.

7. The Parties agree that respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law shall underpin their domestic and international policies and constitute an essential element of this Agreement.

Article 10: Gender Equality

Section 1. The Parties reaffirm their strong commitment to achieving gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by all, as well as everyone's empowerment as a driver for sustainable development. They shall embody the principle of gender equality in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation.

2. The Parties acknowledge that gender inequality deprives women of their basic human rights and opportunities. They shall adopt and strengthen enforceable legislation, legal frameworks and sound policies, programmes and mechanisms to ensure women's and girls' equal access to, equal opportunities in, equal control over, and full and equal participation in, all spheres of life, on an equal footing with men and boys.

Article 11: Inclusive and Pluralistic Societies

Section 2. The Parties shall protect and promote freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly, and media independence and pluralism as pillars of democracy, noting that these are not only human rights but also prerequisites for democracy, development and dialogue.

Article 12: Good governance

1. The Parties reaffirm that good governance rests on transparent, responsible, accountable and participatory governments, and appropriate oversight mechanisms. The Parties agree that good governance is critical to the respect of all human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. They commit to universal access to public services without any discrimination. They further commit to transparency and accountability as integral elements of good governance and institution building.

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President Tinubu Chairs Livestock Reforms' Committee, Creates New Ministry

President Bola Tinubu on Tuesday in Abuja constituted the Presidential Committee on Implementation of Livestock Reforms to address lingering conflicts between herders and farmers and pave the way for productivity in the agricultural sector.

In the same vein, the President created the Ministry of Livestock Development to oversee the affairs of livestock sub-sector.

A statement by the President's spokesman, Chief Ajuri Ngelale, said his principal conceived the moves to open up new opportunities that will be beneficial to farmers, herders, processors, and distributors in the livestock-farming value chain.

Chaired by the President himself, he also appointed former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru Jega, as Co-Chairman of the committee.

Ngelale said Tinubu, during the inauguration at the Council Chamber of the Presidential Villa, emphasised the necessity for collaborative efforts of members of the committee in implementing required reforms drawn from public and private sectors, governors and all Nigerians in general.

Ngelale quoted the President as saying, "From here, I will appeal to everyone to remove every iota of partisan politics from this. I will assume the chairmanship of the committee as President and appoint Professor Attahiru Jega as my deputy or co-chair.



President Tinubu

"This is not about politics; this is about opportunity. This is about our nation. While I may be absent, Jega will preside and continue to promote our objectives."

The statement added that the President thanked the National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Dr. Abdullahi Ganduje, for working hard to get experienced individuals and experts assembled for the task, with a view to ensuring the activation of opportunities inherent in the livestock sector. According to him, the President used the forum to announce the creation of the Ministry of Livestock Development to champion further moves aimed at harnessing potentials in the livestock sector.

"When we have great opportunities in our states, why should Nigerians continue to experience conflicts?

"With the calibre of people that are here, this presents a unique opportunity also to delineate and establish a centric ministry called the Ministry of Livestock Development. It will give us the opportunity so that our veterinary doctors can have the necessary access to research and cross-breed. We can stop the wanton killings," President Tinubu stated.

The President, Ngelale added, called for the review and repositioning of what he described as the traditional method of livestock farming.
He also solicited the support of stakeholders, including state governments, in order to open up new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

He said the President tasked the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr. Lateef Fagbemi (SAN), to remove all legal obstacles to the implementation of the reforms.

He also charged the Minister of Communication, Innovation and Digital Economy, Dr. Bosun Tijani, to provide support with automation.

Samoa Agreement: Beyond Rhetorics

Continued from page 3

2. The Parties commit to the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for the purposes of equitable benefit sharing and sustainable development.

4. The Parties shall ensure transparency and accountability in public funding, including financial assistance, and in the delivery of public services. They shall improve revenue collection and tackle tax evasion and avoidance and illicit financial flows. They agree to cooperate in the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing and engage in timely partnership dialogue at bilateral and international levels on matters related to anti-money laundering and terrorism financing.

5. The Parties shall combat corruption at all levels and in all its forms, developing and implementing or maintaining effective, coordinated anti-corruption policies that reflect the principles of the rule of law, proper management of public affairs and public property, integrity, transparency and accountability. They shall adopt legislative and other measures to prevent and prosecute bribery and embezzlement, misappropriation or other diversion of resources by public officials for their direct or indirect benefit, and to recover and return assets obtained through corruption.

Article 16 Peace and Security

The Parties acknowledge that peace, stability and security, including human security and resilience, are critical for sustainable development and prosperity. There cannot be sustainable development without peace and security, and without inclusive development there cannot be sustainable peace and security. The Parties shall pursue a comprehensive and integrated approach to conflict and crises including situations of fragility, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and address all serious crimes of concern to the international community. The Parties shall address new or increasing security threats, including terrorism and its financing, violent extremism, organised crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, piracy and trafficking in persons, drugs, arms and other illicit goods, and cybercrime and threats to cybersecurity.

These provisions are just fractions of the rich content of the agreement, which has the potential to put Nigeria on the path of good governance, peace, transparency and economic advancement.

Nigeria's External Reserves Rise to $35bn

For the first time since May 30, 2023, 24 hours after President Bola Tinubu assumed office, Nigeria's external reserves rose significantly by $280 million, peaking at $35.05 billion on July 8, this year.

According to Central Bank of Nigeria's data, the country's foreign reserves rose from $34.77 billion on July 5 to $35.05 billion on July 8.

In this month of July, the data showed a steady increase, rising from the initial $34.34 billion to $34.43 billion, $34.55 billion and $34.66 billion from July 1 to 4, respectively.

It is believed that this notable appreciation in Nigeria's foreign reserves was a response to the series of reform initiatives, policies and programmes being spearheaded by the CBN in recent times.

These policies and programmes were meant to stabilise the naira, improve the foreign exchange and curb inflation.

70% of Nigerians Decline to Give Bribe

A new survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows that 70 per cent of Nigerians declined to offer bribes in the outgone year 2023 in at least one occasion.

According to "Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends' Report," released by NBS in Abuja on Thursday, bribery refusal rate is highest in the North-West at 76 per cent rate, while refusal rate recorded in other six zones was above 60 per cent.

The report said about N721 billion was paid in cash as bribes to public officials in Nigeria in 2023, amounting to 0.35 per cent of the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.

Of all citizens who paid bribe in 2023, 8.6 per cent reported their experiences to official institutions with the mandate to investigate such cases or otherwise following up and acting on that report.

"This represents a marked increase in the bribery reporting rate since 2019 when it stood at 3.6 per cent. The increase is primarily driven by developments in the Northern zones, where the bribery reporting rate increased markedly from 4.7 per cent in 2019 to 13.4 per cent in 2023.

"In the Southern zones, the bribery reporting rate, instead decreased moderately from 2.5 per cent in 2019 to 1.7 per cent in 2023," said the report.

According to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), this is the third round of the corruption survey with the first two rounds held in 2016 and 2019, respectively, across the 36 states and the Federal CapitalTerritory.

The report disclosed that in 2023, only 38 per cent of citizens said they suffered negative consequences after declining to give bribe, compared to 49 per cent rate reported in 2019.

"This suggests that Nigerians feel increasingly empowered to confront corrupt officials without fear of repercussions," the report said.

NBS, in the report, noted that in 2023, 21 per cent of those who rejected bribe requests said they did so because they had other ways of getting what they wanted.

However, the report said 42 per cent of those who rejected bribe did so because it was the right, moral thing to do while 23 per cent turned down bribe requests because they could not afford what was demanded.

"This data shows that normative concerns as well as cost of living pressures play an important role in explaining why Nigerians refuse to pay bribes," the report added.

The report also revealed that corruption ranked fourth among the most significant problems affecting the country in 2023 at 10.9 per cent rate.

"Corruption came after the cost of living at 22.6 per cent; insecurity and unemployment at 19 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively.



Ola Olukoyede
EFCC Chairman

"This suggests relatively stable and high levels of concerns about corruption over time and compared to other concerns such as education or housing," the report said.

According to the report, Nigerians' confidence in Federal Government's anti-corruption effort had been declining over time across regions.

It added that in 2019, more than half of all citizens assumed that the Federal Government was effective in fighting corruption, but in 2023, the assumption declined to less than a third of all citizens

"The downward trend in the citizens' confidence is observable across the entire country, with all six zones recording reductions of more than 10 percentage points between 2019 and 2023," it said.

Furthermore, the report said in 2023, more than half of all bribes paid to public officials were requested directly by those officials at 52 per cent rate, while indirect requests accounted for 23 per cent.

It revealed that more than 95 per cent of all bribes paid in 2023 were either paid in cash or money transfer, a slightly larger share than what was recorded in 2019.

President Tinubu Committed to Wellbeing of Youths, Minister Assures

Minister of State for Youth Development, Ayodele Olawande, on Tuesday in Benin, assured the Nigerian youth of the administration of President Bola Tinubu's commitment to the provision of enabling environment for young Nigerians to excel in their chosen vocations.

The minister made the disclosure at a youth empowerment programme organised by Dr. Paddy Emmanuel Foundation.

According to him, the President was in support of the actualisation of young Nigerians' dreams, noting that his appointment was enough proof of the reality of the administration's renewed hope agenda.

"What the President envisaged is a country where a child of nobody would have equal chance to succeed and live a dignified life. The simple fact that the President appointed me, a child of every day Nigerian, is a proof of his desire to build a country that offers equal and fair opportunities to all, irrespective of their economic or social standing," he said.

While imploring beneficiaries of grants at the empowerment ceremony to make judicious use of the funds, Olawande reiterated Federal Government's determination to create an enabling environment that supports the growth of small scale industry where a lot of young people operate.

"As youth, our 'can do' spirit is our greatest strength. We must acknowledge the fact that certificate is not enough. We need skills to succeed. It is when we have skills that will make it easy for Foundations like that of Dr. Paddy to assist the government in empowering us," he added.

Earlier in his welcome address, the Founder of DP Foundation, Dr. Paddy Emmanuel Iyamu, said what the empowerment foundation had consistently delivered in the past 10 years was motivated by the desire to redistribute wealth and make life better for the majority, especially the youth.

Private Airline Menace: FG Moves to Clean Augean Stable

Irked by a series of illegal activities which characterise private airline operations, the Federal Government has constituted a task force to sanitise this aviation sub-sector.

The move, among others, is meant to enhance security and safety, and simultaneously halt illicit activities that have robbed the country of substantial revenues over the years.

Inaugurating the committee recently, Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Mr Festus Keyamo, said operations of private aircraft owners have over the years, not only been largely unchecked, but also unregulated.
He lamented that certain security reports have shown that the increasing spate of money laundering, drug trafficking and other illegal activities in the sector are traceable to private airline operations.

The minister said he was compelled to take decisive actions, including setting up a task force to sanitise the sub-sector after a meeting with regulators and stakeholders in the aviation sector.
Members of the committee, drawn from within and outside the aviation industry, were given six terms of reference.

Major Highlights of FEC Meeting of July 10, 2024

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting of July 10, 2024 took off with the swearing-in of eight new permanent secretaries. Thereafter, council members congratulated President Bola Tinubu on his re-election as Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for another one-year term.

Here are the takeaways as compiled by Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga:

Procurement Act

Council deliberated on the need to align project costs with the budget heads and avoid augmentation after the awards of contracts. Council learnt that the augmented contracts are those inherited by the Tinubu administration, with most of them awarded more than 10-15 years ago.

Council decided that the Attorney-General of the Federation should review the Procurement Act in operation since 2007 to bring it in line with contemporary demands. Henceforth, ministries were urged to reconcile project costs with budget provisions, and where extra funding is needed, get the clearance of the Minister of Budget and Minister of Finance. The two ministers will now serve as a clearing house for capital projects.

Samoa Agreement

The Minister of Budget and Economic Planning and the Minister of Information and National Orientation reported to the council about the misinformation being disseminated by a Nigerian newspaper against the agreement to sow disaffection against the Tinubu administration.

The Minister of Budget reiterated that there was no issue of LGBTQ in the international agreement signed by the Nigerian government. He and the Attorney General also reported that the agreement does not contain any clause that conflicts with our laws and the Constitution. Citing the position of the Nigerian Bar Association. the Minister of Information reported on the complaint filed against the newspaper with the Ombudsman of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria.

ASUU and IPPIS

The council asked the Secretary to the Government of the Federation to expedite the implementation of the council decision made months ago, separating the universities from the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) platform.

National University of Science and Technology, Abuja

Council ratified the anticipatory approval given on 28 May, 2023 by former President Muhammadu Buhari to establish the university in the Federal Capital Territory. The university is the first of the network of Pan African Institutes of Science and Technology dedicated to teaching African scientists and technologists.

Ministry of Livestock Development

Council decided that the ministry be excised from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and developed along the lines suggested by the Presidential Livestock Development Council, now headed by Professor Attahiru Jega.



President Tinubu

The FEC approved some contracts as follows:

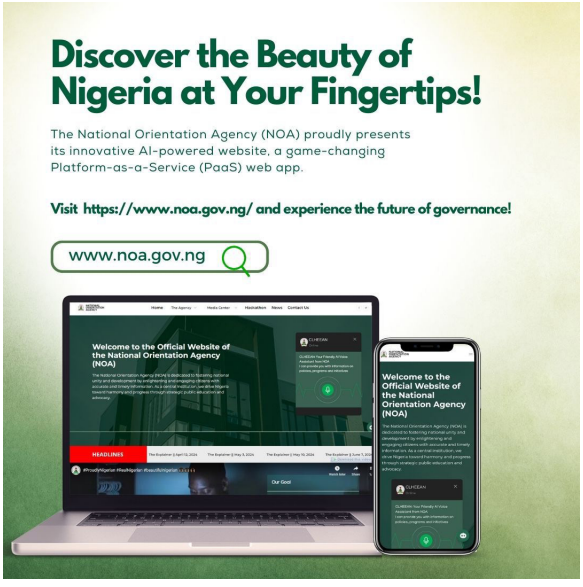
1. Facility Maintenance Service submitted by the Economic and Financial Crimes and Commission (EFCC), in favour of Julius Berger at a cost of N392 million. The contract sum was less than the N533 million approved in 2018 for the yearly maintenance of the headquarters of the EFCC in Abuja.

2. Procurement of 2,000 tractors, 4,000 disc ploughs, 1,000 disc ridges, 1,200 tractor trailers and assorted spare parts. The items to be supplied are for the National Agricultural Mechanisation Programme (NAMP) to strengthen national food security. Astride DMCC, which has done a similar job in Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa and Togo, will supply all the equipment and will also set up a plant to assemble the machinery in the second stage of the contract.

3. Contract for the engineering audit of upstream measurement equipment and facilities in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Upstream Sector in favour of Messrs PE Energy Limited. Completion will be in 180 days.

4. Contract for the procurement of pre-field development studies for advanced declaration solution Technology in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Upstream Sector, in favour of Messrs P-Lyne Energy Limited. Completion will also be in 180 days.

Advertorial



FG, USAID Sign MOU on N115bn Electricity Reforms

In pursuit of electricity sector reforms, the Nigeria's Federal Government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) during the week signed a N115.2 billion Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for effective implementation of electricity reforms and clean energy transition in the country.

The Minister of Power, Mr Adebayo Adelabu, who signed the MoU on behalf of Nigeria, described the move as the expression of Federal Government's commitment to market transparency, liquidity, expansion of Nigeria's access to sustainable, reliable and affordable power supply in partnership with USAID, saying it was also aimed at resolving long-standing issues hindering the delivery of sustainable power to Nigerians.

"It strengthens our collaboration and provides critical resources to tackle the challenges in our power sector. We are committed to working together to ensure transparency, improve market efficiency and accelerate the transition to clean energy solutions," Adelabu said.

He thanked the USAID for its notable interest in Nigeria's electrification efforts, noting that working with USAID would provide the platform to "empower the private sector, strengthen regulation and unlock the full potential of the power sector."

Also speaking at the signing ceremony, Mission Director, USAID Nigeria, Melissa Jones, said the N115.2 billion grant-funded technical assistance programme would boost power sector development and reforms in Nigeria, highlighting the adverse effects of poor power supply on different sectors of the economy.



Mr Adebayo Adelabu

Minister of Power

"Today's goal is to strengthen collaboration between USAID and the Federal Government of Nigeria and to provide a framework for our partnership with other key actors, including state and local governments, electricity generation and distribution sectors and the off-grid sector is laudable and timely.

"The Nigerian power sector's long standing challenges, impair industrial growth and economic competitiveness, rural development, health and education sector performance and the nation's overall economic growth and development," she said.

In his submission, Permanent Secretary, Mahmuda Mamman, who described USAID as a dependable partner to the Ministry of Power, commended the intervention, disclosing that power distribution, which he said had risen to 5,000 megawatts in 2024, might surpass the target of 6,000mw with this intervention at the end of this year.

NELFUND Admits 48 State Institutions to Students' Loan Platform

The Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) on Monday offered students of 36 state-owned tertiary institutions the platform to apply for student loans with immediate effect.
The Fund also extended its hand of fellowship to 12 additional state-owned institutions on Thursday.
According to the Fund, the offer was sequel to the successful submission of students' data by managements of these institutions to NELFUND's Student Verification System (SVS).

The loan management body implored other heads of the state-owned tertiary institutions to emulate their counterparts in the 48 institutions by submitting their students' data to NELFUND's SVS at the nick of time.
It adoed that doing so would offer their students the full fledged opportunities to equally benefit from the scheme.

The institutions cleared to participate in the scheme are: Adamawa State University, Mubi; Ramat Polytechnic, Maiduguri; Borno State University; Mohammed Lawan College of Agriculture, Borno State; Edo State University, Uzairue; Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti; Gombe State University; Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Imo State; Imo State University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo and Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria.
Others are: Yusuf Maitama Sule University, Kano; Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina; Katsina State Institute of Technology and Management; Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero; Confluence University of Science and Technology, Kogi State; Lagos state university of education; Lagos State University, Ojo; Nasarawa State University, Keffi; Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State; University of Medical Sciences, Ondo; Osun State University; University of Ilesa, Osun State, GTC, ARA Osun State; GTC, GBONGAN Osun State; GTC, Ijebu-Jesa Osun State and GTC, Ile-Ife, Osun State
Also involved are GTC, Inisa, Osun State; GTC, IWO Osun State; GTC,Osu, Osun State; GTC, Otan Aiyegbaju, Osun State; Osun State College Of Education, Ila-Orangun; Government Technical College, Ile-Ife; Osun State College of Technology; Taraba State University, Jalingo; Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua, Yobe State and Zamfara State University, Talata Mafara.

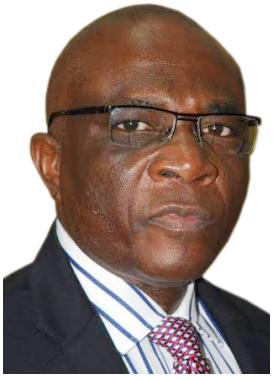
Groundbreaking Ceremony for 2,000 Renewed Housing Units in Eight States Ends

The Ministry of Housing during the week concluded the second phase of its groundbreaking exercise for the construction of 2,000 units in Renewed Hope Housing Estates and Cities in eight states.

The eight states, situated in four geo-political political zones of the country, were Ebonyi and Abia in the South East; Akwa Ibom and Delta in the South South; Osun and Oyo in the South West and Benue and Nasarawa in the North Central.

The first phase of the groundbreaking activities involved 1,500 housing units in five states of two geographical zones, viz: Katsina, Sokoto and Kano (North West) and Yobe and Gombe (North East).

According to a statement by the Director, Information and Public Relations in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Badamasi Haiba, the Minister, Arch. Ahmed Musa Dangiwa, concluded the groundbreaking ceremony with 250 housing units in Renewed Hope Estate in Ibadan, Oyo State.
Haiba said the minister assured Nigerians that all the housing projects would be completed "in a couple of months."



Let the third tier breathe: Implications of the Supreme Court Verdict

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The Supreme Court judgment on July 11, granting financial autonomy to the 774 local councils and recognising them as the third tier of Nigeria's governance architecture, was truly historic. It was perhaps the most remarkable judgment ever delivered by the apex court in recent times, as it used its power to interpret the law to give a different meaning to Section 162 of the Constitution.

Since 1999, governors have used this section to withhold and tamper with the funds federally allocated to the councils, using a Joint Account that has proven to be a honeypot of abuse.

Last Thursday, the Supreme Court described the payment of the allocations to the account as gross misconduct and scolded the governors for dissolving democratically elected councils and setting up caretaker committees. The court's opinion is that caretaker committees are illegal, and councils run by them should not receive the federal allocation. Henceforth, the court ruled that the allocations should go directly to the accounts of the 774 local councils.

Justice Emmanuel Agim, who read the lead judgment, said Nigeria runs a three-tier governance structure, where no one tier is subject to the whims and caprices of the other. He criticised the governors and the state assemblies for almost allowing the councils to go extinct.

Nigerians received the judgment well. According to reports, the verdict ignited jubilation by workers in some local councils, who simultaneously sang praises of the Tinubu administration.

However, some Nigerians criticised it for being an 'assault' on Nigeria's Federalism, as it has rewritten Section 162. My simple response to this school of thought is: Must we allow the law to stand still while the local councils die? The Supreme Court also said that since the governors were using the section to perpetuate unconstitutional acts, the court must ensure that the constitution is not applied in a manner that supports its destruction.

Former vice president Atiku Abubakar grudgingly acknowledged the verdict's import and described it as a win for the people. In a post on X, Atiku wrote: "The court's ruling is a step in the right direction and a major corrective action in greasing the wheels of national development across the country...The verdict of the court is in tandem with the core functions of the Supreme Court as an arbitration court between and among governments."

President Bola Tinubu, whose government instituted the case, welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to affirm the Constitution's spirit, intent, and purpose regarding the statutory rights of local governments. "My administration instituted this suit because of our unwavering belief that our people must have relief, and today's judgement will ensure that only those local officials elected by the people will control the resources of the people. This judgement stands as a resounding affirmation that we can use legitimate means of redress to restructure our country and restructure our economy to make Nigeria a better place to live in and a fairer society for all of our people."

President Tinubu noted that the provision of some essential amenities and public goods, such as the construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lighting, drains, parks, gardens, open spaces, and other residual responsibilities, including community security, has been abandoned owing to the emasculation of local governments.

He said the court's decision to grant financial autonomy to the councils and restate other constitutional principles reinforced the effort to enhance Nigeria's true federal fabric for the development of the entire nation.

President Tinubu and his administration deserved the praise. President Tinubu has earned a double appreciation as a defender of the local councils. As governor of Lagos, he sought the intervention of the same Supreme Court to establish the right of states to create councils in compliance with the provisions of the constitution. In a reverse role, as president, he has succeeded in seeking another intervention of the apex court to establish the right of the councils to survive and perform the role envisaged for them by the constitution.

Former President Muhammadu Buhari had sought to rescue the councils from the governors' vice grip by using executive order 10, which he signed on May 22, 2020, to direct funds straight to the councils, the state legislature, and the judiciary. But governors challenged his authority in a case filed at the Supreme Court. In a split judgment in 2022, the Supreme Court said President Buhari overreached his powers.

In his lamentation, while signing the executive order, President Buhari said, "If the money from the Federation Account to the state is about N100 million, N50 million will be sent to the chairman (of local government), but he (chairman) will sign that he received N100 million. The governor will pocket the balance and share it with whoever he wants to share it with. Then, the chairman of the local government must pay salaries and go to hell with development. When he pays salaries, he puts the balance in his pocket. This is what's happening in Nigeria."

President Tinubu, his successor, sought to combat the problem constitutionally by suing the governors. The attorney General and Justice Minister, Lateef Fagbemi, approached the Supreme Court in May seeking to compel the governors of the 36 states to grant full autonomy to local governments in their domains in a suit marked SC/CV/343/2024. The suit, anchored on 27 grounds, accused the state governors of gross misconduct and abuse of power. He prayed that the Supreme Court would make an order stating that funds standing to the credit of local governments from the Federation Account should be paid directly to the local governments rather than through the state governments.

The justice minister also requested an order restraining governors, their agents, and privies from receiving, spending, or tampering with funds released from the Federation Account for the benefit of local governments when no democratically elected local government system is in place in the states. The court granted his prayers in the landmark ruling of 11 July.

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President Tinubu has always been concerned about the lack of governance at the grassroots. He believes that without fixing the problems at the councils, the objective of developing the country, ensuring security and spreading prosperity to the 200 million people will never be achieved. After all, the 200 million people who live under the councils have been financially handicapped by the governors. He made the point clearly when he met with the leaders of the Arewa Consultative Forum on 30 May in Abuja about the time that the Justice Minister had approached the Supreme Court for the correct interpretation of Section 162.

President Tinubu, responding to the demands of ACF for more roles by the Federal Government, urged the leaders to summon the governors. He said Nigeria as a constitutional democracy has not allowed the councils, where we all live, to flourish, lacing his extemporaneous delivery with the absurdity of politicians going to the locals for votes, only to abandon them and leave for the capitals and Abuja after winning their votes.

As Nigerians celebrate the historic judgment, some work still needs to be done to bring life back to the councils. One issue being raised is how to ensure that the council elections are truly competitive and not predetermined by the governors and the servile state independent electoral commissions. To solve this, some Nigerians have urged the National Assembly to pass a law that will require only the central Independent National Electoral Commission to conduct council elections.

The other problematic issue is the fear that governors will not allow the Supreme Court ruling to have any effect in their domains as they can always order the councils to send the money received from the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee back to the state coffers. Again, a solution to this abuse has been proffered. The EFCC, ICPC, and NFIU should take action to prevent this from happening by monitoring the accounts of the councils. While the governors enjoy immunity to cover their actions, the council chairmen and councillors do not have such cover as they can be arrested, tried and jailed. The threat of arrest and prosecution can serve as a deterrence of any shenanigans at the third-tier level.

While Nigerians await the full implementation of the Supreme Court verdict, we must recap the benefits of the judgment.

One is that local governments in Nigeria will now have more control over their finances, which could lead to improved service delivery and governance at the grassroots level.