

India, Nigeria To Strengthen Ties On ICT, Green Agriculture Others – Envoy

The High Commissioner of India to Nigeria, Gangadharan Balasubramanian, is upbeat that the second edition of the Nigeria -India Business Council (NIBC) will expand the volume of trade between both countries, which currently stands at \$14.95 billion. In this interview with Innocent Odoh, the envoy noted that about 135 Indian companies have made massive investments in Nigeria in the digital economy especially ICT, renewable energy, green agriculture and others. He noted that the NIBC is a platform to expand the economic frontiers for both countries. Excerpt:

India is one of the world's leaders in Digital Economy especially ICT development with significant contributions to the GDP. How much of this digital investment has India made in Nigeria?

There is a digital innovation we call the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) which has enabled digital transactions among Indian citizens and citizens of other countries when they go from one country to the other. Let say for instance there are many students coming from Nigeria to India and there are many businessmen coming from India to Nigeria these people will be in the position to use UPI for their transactions. We have done 8.9 billion transactions with this UPI and it borders on ICT. It is most useful for citizens when they are traveling and useful for the trade. India is willing to deepen investment on this area in Nigeria.

In addition to Indian investment in ICT, there are companies in the software side which are working in Nigeria in developing the infrastructure as well as the technical requirements for these businesses. For example, the Blue Line from Lagos to Ibadan, there is an Indian company that is known for providing the solution for ticketing and passenger services.

Secondly, Airtel, which is the second largest telecommunications outfit in Nigeria, is an Indian company. Only recently, the chairman of Airtel met with the President Bola Tinubu. Airtel has invested more than \$4 billion dollars in telecommunications in Nigeria and ICT is also part of it. There are many other Indian companies working here in the software sector and we are hopeful and confident that ICT will be the next economic frontier that will establish investments in larger areas apart from the traditional areas in which we are present.

Additionally, according to reports in 2023 alone, from January till the end of May, the total investment in ICT in Nigeria has reached the tune of 16 million out of which 4.5 million was made by Indian companies. That is 8% and it promises to be more.



Balasubramanian

Last year, the Nigeria-India Business Council (NIBC) was launched with emphasis on boosting renewable energy, oil and gas, fintech, Artificial intelligence and green agriculture. Can you throw more light on the current situation with the NIBC?

In many of these sectors work has already started. On green agriculture Nigeria and India are working on the International Millet Initiative. According to the United Nations 2023 is the International Year of Millet. We partner with the Nigerian Millet Initiative because this crop can grow in a very harsh condition and it does not need much water. Nigeria is the largest producer of Millet in Africa and India is the largest producer of Millet in the world. We have many startups and many Farmers Producers Organizations (FPO). So, the Nigeria Millet Initiative and India have joined hands to increase Millet production in Nigeria so that there can be more money in the hands of farmers.

We are also working on sugarcane, rice and others. Some of the Indian companies have even started palm oil farms. So these are some of the areas we are already working on and we hope that by the second edition of the NIBC which we are planning for August, we will be able to consolidate the progress that has been made and open new vistas.

Nigeria and India have over the years collaborated on defense and security. However, Nigeria is bedeviled by protracted terrorism and other forms of violent agitations. What strategy

do you think Nigeria must adopt to curb these crises?

The security architecture of any country is an internal issue. However, India has been offering Nigerians training, capacity building including in the area of defense. We offer more than 150 scholarships every year for military officers, the police and others. We have a specialized training program for law enforcement agencies which have gone to India and got knowledge on how India has experienced security challenges and how we have overcome that.

So, training is something that we are more than happy to do and we will continue to do so. I can give you an example. A team of Indian army officers had come to Nigeria; they stayed in Jaji for about six months and impacted training to many people in the armed forces on anti-terrorism and counterinsurgency. So, training and capacity building are what we will be more than happy to share with Nigeria.

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) has offered training to about 500 Nigerians annually for capacity building. As more Nigerians aspire to participate in the programme, do you have plans to increase the number?

Given the strong relationship that India has with Nigeria and given the fact that historically capacity building is one of the strong points of our bilateral relations, India is certainly open to expanding this cooperation with Nigeria. There is this issue of 500 scholarships for short term training given to Nigerians in Indian institutions. The ITEC started in 1964 and you can imagine the number of Nigerians that have actually benefited from the programme which run into thousands bringing specific changes within the system.

In addition to the ITEC we have also provided more than 4836 scholarships to students in various universities for their online education. So training and capacity building is one area that we are strong and we are certainly going to expand this cooperation especially as we draw closer to the G20 Summit that will be hosted by India for which we have invited Nigeria.

NEWS ANALYSIS

UN Honours Princess Adejoke Adefulire For In Promoting SDGs

BY INNOCENT ODOH, Abuja

The United Nations in Nigeria has honoured the former Senior Special Assistant to the President on Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP-SDGs) Princess Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire with 'SDGs Champion' award.

According to a statement issued by Dr. Oluseyi Soremekun of the United Nations Information Center, the award was in recognition of her commitment and visionary leadership in promoting the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

At the award ceremony held at the UN House Abuja, on 20 June 2023, Nigeria's First Lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, commended the United Nations in Nigeria for rewarding performance and dedication.

The First Lady who was represented by the National Women Leader for the All Progressives Congress (APC) Dr Betta Edu said "I thank the UN and the organizers of this award for finding it imperative to reward performance and dedication. This will go a long way in instilling a sense of duty and encourage more people in their services to the nation, to give their best.

The First Lady assured the United Nations in Nigeria that "We will remain partners in building a virile and prosperous Nigeria in our quest to renew hope especially now that we are rebuilding."

On the awardee, Senator Tinubu emphasized that Princess Adefulire's inclusive and dedicated approach to national assignment endeared her to the stakeholders

and eventually brought out the best in her.

Highlighting the contribution of the awardee to the implementation of SDGs at the sub-national level, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Matthias Schmale noted, "Your firm belief that the Sustainable Development Goals are for everyone everywhere, is a constant reminder that Agenda 2030 is neither for just one part of the country, nor for just one group of people."

He underlined that the UN in Nigeria is ready to engage with the new government on how to accelerate achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 agenda.

In her acceptance speech, Princess Adefulire expressed her appreciation of the United Nations Country Team for the commitment and tremendous support towards the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria.

"Together, we have made significant progress in our collective desire to achieve the SDGs and leave no Nigeria behind," she said. She also disclosed that as of December 2022, her office had completed the long and meticulous process of institutionalizing the SDGs in Nigeria; while all the institutional frameworks required to support the effective implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria were also in place.

"It is with a great sense of gratitude and honour that I accept this humbling and prestigious United Nations SDGs Champion Award. I accept it on behalf of my formidable team at OSSAP-SDGs and thousands of unsung heroes in Nigeria," Adejoke added.

Condemnation Trails Arrest Of Gail Walker For Defending Cuba

BY INNOCENT ODOH, Abuja

The United States Organization of Pastors for Peace has denounced the arrest of its director Gail Walker, after trying to meet peacefully with Congressman Robert Menéndez to discuss cruel policies towards Cuba.

In the video uploaded to her Facebook account, a policeman can be seen leading Walker in handcuffs, while she explains that she only intended to speak with the senator in his office and demand the end of Cuba's designation on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism as well as the normalization of relations between the United States and the island.

This was ahead of this weekend's planned demonstrations in various cities in the United States and the world to demand that the US government remove Cuba from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism.

"We should be able to talk about Cuba with our representatives without being arrested," Walker said in the video, where he also explained that they requested several times to meet with Menéndez,

but never received a response.

"We are in defense of our Cuban family because we believe this policy is unfair," the executive director of the Interfaith Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO)-Pastors for Peace, added before entering the elevator escorted by two officers.

IFCO-Pastores por la Paz is a group founded in 1992 by Reverend Lucius Walker and which has maintained relations of solidarity with the Caribbean nation for 31 years.

The United States-Cuba Friendship Caravan or, simply, the Caravan of Pastors for Peace, brought to the island in its first edition in 1992, 15 tons of aid for the health and education sectors, two of which were hardest hit by that hostile White House policy.

When the Reverend Lucius Walker gave life to this initiative, his purpose was to circumvent the framework of laws and regulations of the blockade against Cuba by the United States, a policy that, as he defined it, is anti-evangelical and aggressive with a severe social impact in the Antillean nation.