



# THE ADVOCACY BULLETIN

*The Nigerian Physicians Advocacy Group*



## STATE OF PLAY: ELECTORAL REFORM IN NIGERIA

*By Dr. Susan Edionwe*

Electoral reform is a hot button topic right now for many Nigerians, both at home and in the diaspora. Riddled with a checkered and, at times, appalling history of election controversies, Nigeria is no stranger to electoral reform especially after the creation of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) in 1999, on the heels of the Fourth Republic. Since the creation of INEC, three electoral reform processes have occurred and now Nigeria is in the midst of a fourth.

INEC is the judicial body that is charged with conducting elections for the offices of President, Vice President, National Assembly members, Governors, Deputy Governors and state House of Assembly. It is also responsible for registering and monitoring political parties and political campaigns. INEC has traditionally had substantial input into the electoral reform process undertaken by the National Assembly (NASS) and this go-round is no different.

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It is, in fact, INEC's intention to modernize voting for Nigerians with things such as electronic balloting (e-voting) and political inclusion of women, youth and persons of disabilities ahead of the 2023 elections. This has led to the strong urging from INEC and Nigerians alike of the NASS to officially amend the 2010 Electoral Act and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, a feat which has yet to happen.

The INEC has also initially reported its readiness for diaspora voting pending amendments to the electoral bill. Diaspora voting is not a new concept. Over 100 countries offer some form of diaspora voting or rights of expatriates to vote in their country of origin, including 39 African countries. Heralded as "no greater recognition of migrants as national citizens than the ability to vote in home-country elections" (APCG), Nigeria's diaspora is long overdue for this provision.

Why should diaspora voting happen? Taken from the chairman of INEC himself, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood, "INEC believes that Nigerians living outside the country should have the right to vote for a variety of reasons: they are citizens of Nigeria interested in the affairs of their own country; they make considerable contribution to the economy through huge financial inflow to the country; there is a sizable amount of Nigerian citizens living outside the country; and Diaspora voting is consistent with global best practices".

The question remains, will the National Assembly play ball or is the enticing electoral reform INEC has proposed a pipe dream.

NPAG is following electoral reform developments closely to report to our members. Stay tuned.

## NPAG & THE COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL OF NIGERIANS IN THE DIASPORA

*By Dr. Susan Edionwe*

In early 2020, NPAG became one of the co-founding organizations for a body known as the Collaborative Council of Nigerians in the Diaspora (CCND). NPAG along with organizations like To Build A Nation (TBAN) and the Nigerian American Public Affairs Committee (NAPAC) created CCND with the intention to form a collective that would "advocate for the welfare, growth and development of Nigerians everywhere by cultivating partnership, collaborative, inclusive, and unifying network of Nigerians from different professional and parochial organizations that share a common goal of pursuing impactful change in our communities and Nigeria that serves to amplify our voices".



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The incipient for NPAG's involvement with CCND was initially for a unified voice for electoral reform lobbying in Nigeria spearheaded by TBAN. Yet, now, CCND has become a key partner in many of NPAG's projects.

We are excited to announce that in 2021, NPAG will enter into an MOU with CCND, cementing this relationship for the foreseeable future.



## DIASPORA VOTING SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN NEW ELECTORAL ACT

*UPDATE, Lagos Nigeria*

On Wednesday, December 09, 2020, the National Assembly Joint Committee on Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) And Electoral Matters held a public hearing on the proposed new Electoral Act. Wide-ranging important recommendations, including on electronic voting, electronic transmission of results, prosecution of electoral offenses, effectuating the ceiling for campaign funding, voter education and continuous registration of voters, were made to the joint committee by INEC and civil society groups that participated, including To Build A Nation (TBAN). However, both INEC and the joint committee expressed reservations on the readiness of the country to have diaspora voting.

This, therefore, raises concern as to whether the next amendments to the Electoral Act would include provisions that would provide a legislative backing for diaspora voting in the country.

TBAN believes this disposition is regrettable. We believe now is the time to provide a legislative backing for diaspora voting in Nigeria's elections. There is ample time to operationalize a pilot phase for diaspora voting in the 2023 general election and full implementation from 2027.

Allowing Nigerians abroad to vote in the country's elections has been on the policy discussion since the early years of the Fourth Republic. It is the extent to which the authorities have not committed to the delivery of key electoral reforms that there has been no progress whatsoever on the diaspora voting agenda. E-voting and electronic transmission of results make diaspora voting much easier to implement.

Diaspora voting is not a favor to eligible Nigerian voters living abroad. It is an imperative for a number of reasons. One, Nigeria's democracy needs new blocs of informed voters who are not susceptible to vote-buying by corrupt

politicians. This is necessary for the country to be able to elect credible and competent leaders. TBAN identifies Nigerian middle class and Nigerians in diaspora as the key new voting blocs.

Two, the government needs to enable all the citizens to perform their civic duty of voting during our elections. And, three, Nigerians in diaspora are a key stakeholder bloc, contributing over \$20 billion annually in official migrant remittances to support their relatives in the country and the economy. Nigeria cannot wait to restore credibility to its elections that have continued to witness fewer people voting from one election to another since 2003. We, therefore, task both the National Assembly and INEC to deliver the legislative and operational frameworks for diaspora voting without further delay.

Signed

Jide Akintunde

Executive Director, TBAN

Co-founding organization of CCND

# HELP YOURSELF TO GOOD HEALTH

by Dr. Biodun Ogungbo, Neurosurgeon. Abuja, Nigeria

## This Is Nigeria.

One hoped that we had better allocation of resources to start with. Health has a lower allocation than Defence and the allocation has been sliding for years. It's nowhere near the agreed minimum percentage made in Abuja itself once upon a time (it's that long ago!).

Why would anyone expect to have productive members of a society when they are unwell, be it physically or mentally? Many people simply plod on - with just enough in them to "collect" their monthly wages - if they are lucky enough to be paid on time.

If not, then the pressure increases and becomes overwhelming. And that extends to doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers mostly in government institutions.

Neither are those clinics and hospitals adequately equipped or funded and the patients can't afford the long list of things needed to properly care for them.

Anything you do is like a drop of water in a bottle of black ink. Still, we have no choice but to hope and pray and then work hard to improve the health indices of our dear country.

Listen, we must start from the primary healthcare clinics in your local area. When was the last time you showed up in the clinic to see for yourself? To ask what they need and how you can help? Can you or could you volunteer your skills and services? Can you pop in there for an hour a week to help: in triage, in cleaning or even with psychological support for the staff? Are you able to help repair this or that, repaint this or that or supply this and that?

Not for gain but as a community service?



What can you bring to the table in a self-help or community group to uplift your primary healthcare centre, so that should you, a relative, a friend or a neighbour, even a stranger needs their meagre services they would be able to respond and offer some assistance?

Think about this then go out and help yourself to good health.

**Above:** The primary health center in Ifesowapo Oloya area, Monatan, Oyo State, southwest Nigeria which ran out of free anti-malarial drugs in October 2018. Photo by: Paul Adepoju / Devex



# The LOBBY(IST)

by Dr. Iyore James

## COVID 19 Vaccine Procurement and Distribution

Nigeria expects to vaccinate at least 40% of its population against COVID-19 in 2021. Health minister, Dr. Osagie Ehanire disclosed that 42 million vaccine doses would be delivered to the country through the African Union, African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) in 2021. The Nigerian government plans to receive 16 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine by the end of this month through the WHO-led COVAX program. Meanwhile, Nigeria's private sector Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) spearheaded by the Central Bank of Nigeria, Aliko Dangote Foundation and Access Bank is working on mobilizing funds to purchase additional vaccines that may be acquired outside the COVAX program. The vaccine distribution scheme for any of these acquisitions is yet to be fully publicized.



## Can Nigeria make its' own vaccines?

Short answer: NO!

Between 1940 and 1991, Nigeria manufactured large quantities of vaccines against smallpox, rabies and yellow-fever for domestic use while exporting to neighboring African countries. Production was conducted at the Yaba Vaccine Production Laboratory in Lagos state. Vaccine production stopped in 1991 when the federal government decided to upgrade the facility using newer technology. The upgrade was never performed. In 2005, BioVaccines Nigeria Limited was incorporated. This was a joint venture between the Federal Government of Nigeria (to own 49% equity) and May & Baker Nigeria Plc (to own 51% equity). The initiative came shortly after the country experienced increased death from meningococcal epidemic. The goal of the joint venture was to revive vaccine production in Nigeria. Vaccine production was expected to begin between 2017 and 2021. As of this writing, Biovaccines is still not set up to begin vaccine manufacturing.

The Ministry of Finance recently released N10 billion to support COVID-19 vaccine production in Nigeria. This is in addition to the N6.45 billion that was approved by President Muhammadu Buhari to set up oxygen gas plants in 38 locations across the country in an effort to curtail preventable deaths due to lack of supplemental oxygen.

In what capacity will the N10 billion for COVID-19 vaccine production be utilized?

Why is Biovaccines Nigeria Limited still non-operational?

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

February is Black history month. We celebrate the courageous men and women that fought to achieve full citizenship for Blacks in America. We celebrate accomplishments of descendants of slaves. We remember that the successes of African immigrants in America was predicated on these freedom warriors. For without their efforts, what would be our fate?

Iyore James MD/MALD, FACS

"I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear."

*Rosa Parks*

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

*Barack Obama*

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

*Frederick Douglass*