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# CROSSROADS

A photograph of two men shaking hands at a podium. The man on the left is wearing a white traditional Nigerian attire and a black cap. The man on the right is wearing a dark suit, a light blue shirt, and a red tie. They are standing in front of a podium with two microphones. Behind them are the Nigerian flag and the United States flag. The background shows a building with a grid of windows and eagle finials.

***BUILDING  
DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTIONS***

**The 2019  
Elections**

# Assistant Secretary of State Visit to Nigeria

November 7-8, 2018



Assistant Secretary (AS) of State for African Affairs, Tibor Nagy delivers a lecture to students and faculty of Baze University, Abuja



AS Tibor Nagy receives a gift presented by the leadership of ECOWAS following acourtesy visit to the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja



AS Tibor Nagy met with the leadership of the All Progressive Party - Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Ameachi and Deputy National Chairman (south), Otunba Niyi Adebayo



AS Tibor Nagy addresses members of the press during a press roundtable at Baze University, Abuja



Ambassador Symington and AS Tibor Nagy hosted leaders of American business to a dinner meeting



AS Tibor Nagy met with the leadership of the People's Democratic Party - Senate president, Bukola Saraki and party chairman, Prince Uche Secondus



*W. Stuart Symington*  
U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria

Welcome to another edition of Crossroads.

As the people of Nigeria approach their general elections next year, all of us at the U.S. Mission look forward to witnessing an electoral process that surpasses the success of the 2015 elections, which were widely considered peaceful, free, and fair.

In this issue, we describe some of the ways we've partnered with Nigerians to achieve that goal. We have engaged with the Nigerian government, key election stakeholders, political leaders, civil society representatives, and members of the voting public. Our only candidate is the process itself. Our goal is your goal: a process that is transparent, credible, free, fair, and peaceful. Elections that reflect the true will of the Nigerian people.

The recent visit to Nigeria of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Tibor Nagy, highlighted our commitment. During his two-day visit, he met with the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Sultan of Sokoto, and the leadership of Nigeria's most prominent political parties, among others. The key message he shared with everyone he met is that, as I said above, America favors only one candidate in these elections – and

that is the electoral process. No individual ambition, no political party's aspirations, are worth more than the right of citizens to freely choose who will represent them.

There are many stakeholders in this election. The most important are the voters themselves. Every eligible voter, registered with INEC and in possession of a Permanent Voters Card, has a responsibility to peacefully ensure that their vote is cast, counted, and collated. When you do this, along with every other citizen in your community and across the country, no bad actors will hijack the process and steal your future. In doing this, you will act as responsible custodians of Nigeria's future, and that will ensure a more free and prosperous world, benefitting all of us.

Enjoy the read.

**W. Stuart Symington**

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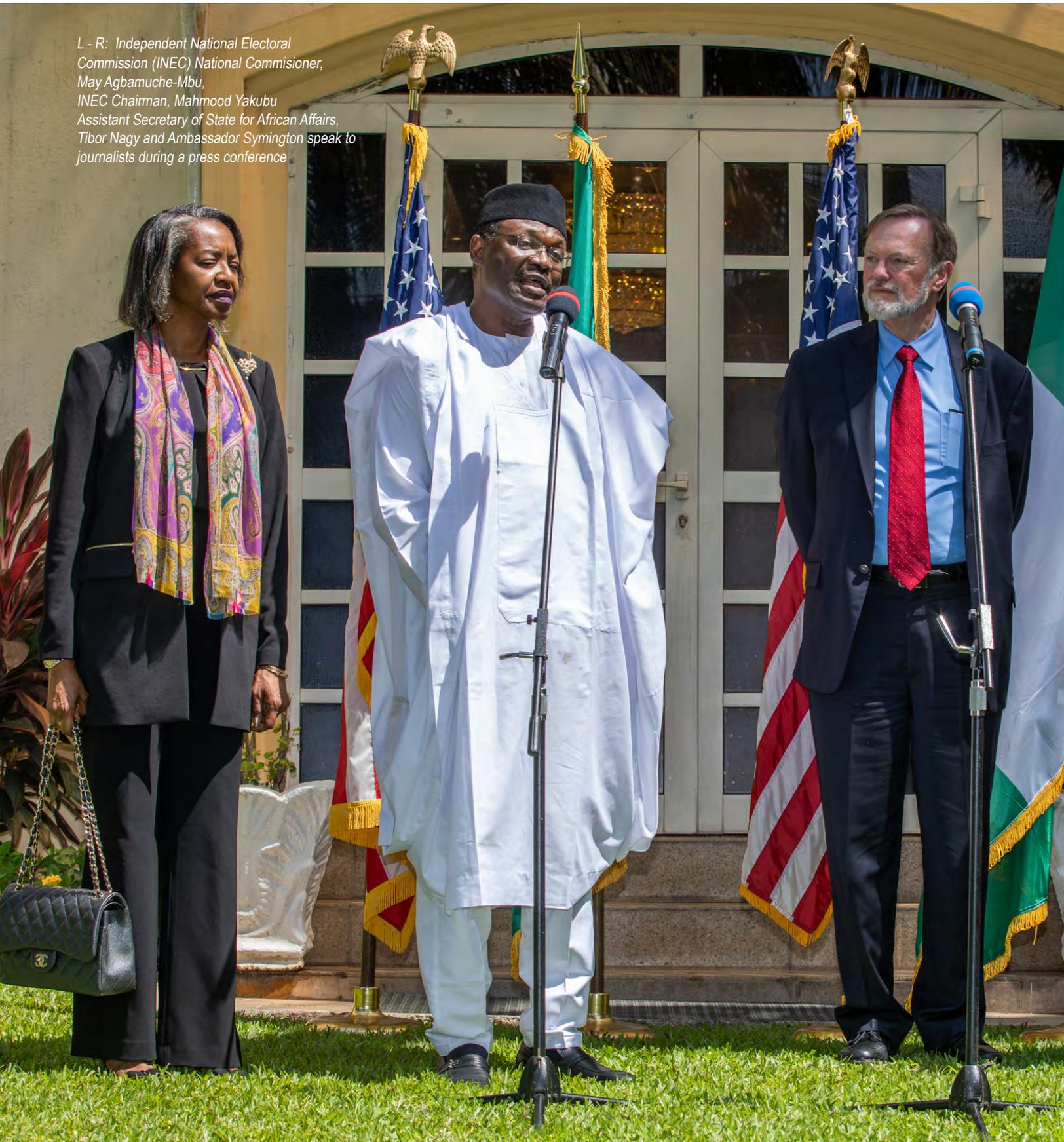
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*L - R: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) National Commissioner, May Agbamuche-Mbu, INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Tibor Nagy and Ambassador Symington speak to journalists during a press conference*





# ***BUILDING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS***

## THE 2019 ELECTIONS

by Mirna Torres

**N**igeria's 2015 general elections were the most free, fair and peaceful elections since the transition to democracy in 1999, and resulted in the first democratic transfer of power from the incumbent to an opposition political party in the country's history. The United States is eager to support Nigeria in consolidating and extending these democratic gains as it holds its next elections for president, vice president, National Assembly members, governors, deputy governors, and State Houses of Assembly in 2019.

The people of Nigeria are working to build ever stronger democratic institutions. The United States Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria

supports that goal. As an impartial observer, and a strong supporter of an unbiased electoral process, the U.S. seeks enhanced voter confidence in the credibility of their elections. Minimizing electoral violence is another shared concern, and is critical to evolving a robust, stable, and prosperous Nigerian democracy.

Nigeria deserves a free, fair, transparent, credible, and peaceful electoral process, one that serves national cohesion and stability, and leads to even stronger democratic institutions. To that end, U.S. Mission Nigeria is working with other members of the diplomatic community, members of civil society, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC),



*A Vote Not Fight volunteer supports the U.S. position for free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections in 2019*

In addition to high-level engagement with INEC officials to discuss INEC's preparation and implementations plans for the 2019 elections, U.S. officials have also met with political leaders, civil society representatives and traditional leaders to discuss concerns about political violence and encourage politicians to make public peace pledges. U.S. representatives have advocated for interventions that enfranchise as many legitimate voters as possible, including women, youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and people with disabilities.

Recognizing the need for an election season in which violence does not call into question electoral credibility, does not impede the ability of citizens to peacefully participate in the electoral process, or threaten the stability of the country, Mission Nigeria has engaged with like-minded ambassadors to stress the need for peaceful elections.

Since the media plays a crucial role in providing accurate information to help citizens make their decisions, the U.S. Mission has given support to Nigerian journalists. It has provided elections related information and workshops to members of the press - from television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms - from all across Nigeria. The workshops have stressed the importance of fact-based, balanced and unbiased reporting. The Mission has also consistently advocated against any attempts to silence journalists, online activists, and bloggers and/or suppress peaceful assembly and protest.

**Looking Forward to the 2019 Elections**

President Muhammadu Buhari (APC), will face former vice president Atiku Abubakar (PDP) in a hotly contested election. Will the polling show that the democratic process of 2015 was the new normal, or only an aberration in Nigeria's historically-troubled political evolution? For this bellwether country, the continent's largest and richest democracy, the 2019 elections will test the government's commitment to transparency and democratic institutions.

and members of political parties to promote credible and peaceful elections.

**U.S. Engagement with Key Election Stakeholders**

Given Nigeria's political and economic importance within Africa and the world, it is critically important that its upcoming elections serve as a democratic example. During the past year, the U.S. Mission has urged

key political actors to refrain from violence and to offer voters a clear vision coupled with detailed policies to move the state forward. Senior U.S. officials have also met with election stakeholders to emphasize the importance of proficiently run elections. To that end the Mission has supported INEC in its efforts in modernizing and increasing the capabilities of its personnel.



*Deputy Chief of Mission, David Young led the U.S. observation team during the Osun state elections*

# THE 2018 OSUN ELECTIONS

## AND NIGERIA'S GREATEST RESOURCE

by Benjamin Williams

Ambassador Symington has said many times that Nigeria's greatest resource is not its vast oil reserves, nor its large mineral deposits, but its people – Nigeria's amazing human resources. To me, this was nowhere more evident than in the September 22 off-cycle gubernatorial election in Osun State, where thousands of domestic election observers did their part to foster a free, fair, credible, and non-violent electoral process.

While on the ground in Osun on Election Day, I personally witnessed hundreds of Nigerian citizen observers doing their part to move Nigerian democracy forward, hailing from various civil society organizations (CSOs) like the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA Africa), the Policy and Legal Advocacy Center (PLAC), the Civil

Society Situation Room, the CLEEN Foundation, among many others.

For our part, the United States sent 52 Mission personnel to Osun for the September 22 election. Forming eight teams, our international observer mission crisscrossed the state on Election Day and visited all 30 Local Government Areas (LGAs), stopping at roughly 300 of the state's 3,010 polling units to observe the casting and counting of votes. Our observer teams coordinated with other international missions, like the European Union and the United Kingdom, to increase the reach of the international observer mission. But even with our international partners, we likely reached just 10 percent of the total number of polling units in Osun State.

This explains the immense value of Nigeria's own citizen observers on Election Day. With thousands of

observers from many different CSOs, Nigerian domestic observers covered far more ground than our international observer missions ever could. Nigerian domestic observers not only did their part by watching polling units, thus warding off foul play on Election Day. They also observed vote counting and reported those numbers back to YIAGA's Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) team, which uses data analytics based on citizen observer reports to project the likely outcome of a given election. As you can imagine, the PVT guards against manipulation of election results, because YIAGA and its observers provide an independently-verified likely outcome, against which we can compare the official election results. Domestic observers and the PVT provide vital safeguards for Nigeria's young democracy.

Even among the world's oldest democracies, there is no such thing as a perfect election. The important thing, as time goes on, is that the quality of Nigeria's elections continues to improve with each election cycle. One key way to improve the quality of elections in Nigeria is to increase voter turnout and boost the participation of Nigerian citizens in their own vibrant democracy. The more voters there are, the harder it is for bad actors to sully the democratic process with violence, suppression, vote-buying, or ballot box snatching.

With this in mind, and as the 2019 national elections approach, I urge you to use your PVC and exercise your right to vote. And if you see domestic election observers at your polling unit, thank them for doing their part to safeguard your democracy. Remember that you are Nigeria's most precious resource. Voting is your right – when February comes, go out and vote!



A disabled voter poses with U.S. Mission election monitor, Ben Williams after proudly casting his vote

# The YALI Accountability and Transparency Summit

by Diran Adegoke



L -R: Moderator, Dayo Benjamins-Laniyi, Guest Speaker, Sentell Barnes, U.S. Embassy Cultural Affairs Officer, Sterling Tilley, YALI Network Coordinator (U.S. Consulate Lagos) Austin Emeanua during the summit in Abuja

On Tuesday September 4, 2018, delegates of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Network gathered in Abuja for the YALI Accountability and Transparency Summit. The summit was the first national gathering of the network since its inception in 2014. The YALI Network in Nigeria consists of over 120,000 members organized into state hubs in 23 states, with seven more hubs scheduled to launch in the coming weeks.

The YALI Accountability and Transparency summit was convened with the goal of enhancing the abilities of young Nigerians to constructively raise advocacies that will achieve a

more transparent and accountable leadership at State and Federal levels in Nigeria. The summit featured panel sessions, trainings, and a UN-style assembly that focused on coming up with ideas and projects of how the youth can support the government in delivering the dividends of democracy to her citizens.

Speaking at the summit, Sterling Tilley, Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Abuja stated “The YALI Network is a group of young Nigerians who are not just talking but are already turning that talk into action. That is why the U.S. Embassy is proud to support this summit in order to amplify your voices and make your work equally visible

in the national discourse”. Mr. Tilley also used the occasion to announce the launch of YALI Network NaijaVotes campaign, a series of online and in-person activities aimed at educating Network members and propel them to take action to address voter apathy, vote buying, spread of false information and hate speech, and election violence, as Nigeria prepares for her forthcoming general elections.

The summit ended on Thursday September 6, 2018 with the drafting of a 47-point communique addressing issues of health care delivery, education, security, trade and investment; which will be presented to government and media.

# Refreshed and Prepared

by Sani Mohammed

## *Two-Day Embassy Practical and Virtual Training Workshop Hones Journalists Skills on Election Reporting*

The U.S. Embassy in Abuja organized a two-day practical and virtual training workshop for political reporters representing multiple media platforms in Abuja, and viewing parties at American Spaces in Ibadan, Calabar, Kano and Bauchi from November 13 to 14, 2018. The training was part of the U.S. Mission's support to Nigeria on the processes leading up to the 2019 elections.

Nigeria's general elections have been scheduled for February 16, and March 2, 2019. The United States has repeatedly said it is not supporting any

candidate, but does support the process, a point reiterated by U.S. Ambassador W. Stuart Symington during the workshop.

Award-winning journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Premium Times Musikilu Mojeed led the practical workshop, while U.S. Speakers Professor Gary Kebbel, a professor of journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, VOA's Managing Editor Aliyu Mustapha, and his colleague Peter, Clottey, host of "One-on-One" TV program and "Nightline Africa" radio program conducted the virtual workshop for the two days.

Professor Idachaba, Director, Broadcast Monitoring at the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Barrister Festus Okoye, national commissioner and chairman, information and voter education at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) made presentations, refreshing the journalists' knowledge of the rules guiding elections reporting.

Ambassador Symington said the world looks up to Nigeria for free, fair, credible and peaceful election in 2019, and tasked the journalists to be the sacred link between citizens and their leaders.

"In a democracy where there are freedoms and a nation where there are citizens, there has to be a two-way communication connection, and the media is the sacred conduit connecting people and their leaders," Ambassador Symington stated.

The two-day training included brainstorming sessions, which gave the participants the opportunity to review past election reporting challenges and to learn best practices from the trainers both in Washington and in Abuja.

All the trainers and guest speakers emphasized the need for journalists to help educate citizens on the election processes and focus politicians on the issues. They also advised the journalists to involve the voters in their reporting, avoid bias, partisan conduct or opinions that could jeopardize their safety during elections and to fact-check their information and sources for accuracy.



Musikilu Mojeed, Editor in chief, Premium Times leading the practical workshop



A cross section of participants during the workshop

# ROOTING FOR THE NIGERIAN PEOPLE

by Zack Taylor

*In the upcoming elections, the United States and USAID support free fair, transparent, and peaceful polls.*

Asked who the United States wants to emerge victorious in the upcoming presidential election, Ambassador W. Stuart Symington always gives the same answer – the Nigerian people.

As in 2015 and in 2011 before it, the U.S. Mission supports a process and not a candidate in the upcoming races for the Nigerian presidency, state governorships, and state legislature seats in 2019. Like those previous elections, the U.S. mission is rooting only for a free, fair, transparent, and above all peaceful electoral process.

In support of this goal, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

invests in assistance to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society organizations (CSOs), and political parties to enhance voter education, strengthen party development, and support international election observation for a robust, inclusive process free of violence.

Since 2014, \$58.2 million portfolio of USAID activities – with \$18.6 million co-funded by the British Department for International Development – is helping INEC institutionalize reforms to ensure credibility and accountability, assist CSOs in their critical function of oversight and mobilization of the electorate, and boost participation among marginalized groups such as

women and persons with disabilities, and mitigate drivers of political violence.

USAID supports INEC's administration of the elections process, political party formulation of issues-based campaigns, and building awareness among the electorate about their rights and roles in the democratic process as both participants and candidates.

"Peaceful and credible elections are critical to development in Nigeria," Mission Director Stephen M. Haykin said. "Our elections support activities help provide a channel for Nigerians to choose leaders who will govern democratically and improve basic services for citizens. In that sense, our support to free and fair elections is as important as any of the work we do."

### Electoral Reform and INEC

For the election results to be fully embraced and accepted by the Nigerian people, INEC's processes and outcomes must be seen as beyond reproach. To this end, USAID trains INEC electoral officers in election administration and operations, builds its capacity to coordinate security planning, develop effective dispute resolution mechanisms, and develop more inclusive voting access policies.

USAID assists INEC in enhancing coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of election management processes, which includes: support

centers to monitor deployment of materials and collection of ballots; designing of ballots and voter education materials; preparing the judicial system for election petition tribunals; training in alternative electoral dispute resolution mechanisms; and, campaign finance awareness.

### Civil Society Strengthening

USAID strengthens CSO capacity to monitor elections, training more than 3,000 domestic monitors to conduct a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT), or "quick count," which independently measures the quality of Election Day processes and results. The activity also sets up a conflict early warning system that identifies emerging trends that may trigger conflict.

"All our work is about building the skills of local groups so they can be active participants in the governance of their own country," said Aubrey McCutcheon, senior resident director of the National Democratic Institute, a longtime USAID elections partner. "While the funding is foreign, the training strengthens the indigenous CSOs who are doing all the work in mobilizing Nigerians to ensure free and fair polls through their oversight."

McCutcheon said the PVT framework allows citizens and organizations not affiliated with the government to independently validate the results announced by INEC, to verify the results as legitimate or not by taking

statistical samples of polling units in every local government area around the country.

It also codifies comprehensive monitoring of everything from the set-up to the voting to the counting afterward, reporting "parallel" results within a margin of error and irregularities such as intimidation and vote buying, which was a serious issue in September's Osun State gubernatorial election. Critical pre-election observation for early warning signs of violence provides reports to other civil society and security agencies to mitigate violence before it worsens.

### Energizing Youth

Likewise, USAID has played a significant role in fostering political leaders by strengthening youth organizations to shape the national political atmosphere, according to Obinna Udenwa, 30, who helped shape a USAID-supported Youth Manifesto through the Youngstars Foundation, and now a candidate for office in Ebonyi State.

Through that manifesto came the idea of the Not Too Young to Run bill (see sidebar) which proposed reducing the age limit to stand for political office and was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari in May of 2018.

"But that is not enough," Udenwa said of the new law. "The older generation of Nigerian leaders has no



Volunteers record the parallel vote tabulation during the recent Osun state gubernatorial elections in September 2018



PVT project director, Cynthia Mbamalu explains the parallel vote tabulation process to INEC National Commissioner, May Agbamuche-Mbu



*Innocent '2baba' Idibia and volunteers of Youngstars Foundation met with Anambra state governor, Willie Obiano ahead of the 2017 governorship elections*

mentorship program that would enable young protégés get into positions of leadership. Youth must rise to this challenge and get involved."

Historically, said McCutcheon, youth have served as pawns in Nigerian elections – recruited by politicians as hired agents for violence, who for small sums of money they would recruit to disrupt polling places, snatch ballot boxes, or worse.

### **Promoting Peace**

To counter this trend, USAID supports a campaign to raise awareness and change attitudes and instill in youth the importance of being active --and peaceful-- participants in the process. Since 2014, the Vote Not Fight: Election No Be War campaign has utilized popular culture to promote peace, including peace concerts staged by media star Innocent Idibia popularly known as "2Baba." As a longtime volunteer peace Campaign Ambassador, 2Baba has led voter registration drives and sponsors forums where candidates sign peace pledges and commit to action on campaign promises if elected.

The explosion of social media has played a great role in getting the

youth of Nigeria more involved in the politics of their country as well as other social issues, USAID actively supports overarching media work under hashtags #VoteNotFight and #ElectionNoBeWar from state television to local media, advocating for peace and participation anchored by the profile 2Baba and his charitable Foundation brings to the campaign prescribing issues-based discourse as the antidote to election-day violence.

"2Baba's work cuts a path for other CSOs," says McCutcheon.

### **Political Party Engagement**

USAID supports development of strong, inclusive political parties to strengthen their engagement with constituents and develop platform-based involvement with government processes, and helping major parties to become more representative of and responsive to citizens. Not only do USAID activities help improve frequency and intensity of interactions with their constituents, but also foster better communication among party officials, officeholders, candidates and rank and file members at all levels.

"We're trying to connect citizens to governance to ensure citizens are

active participants in the political process," said Sentell Barnes, chief of party of the International Republican Institute in Nigeria, another longtime USAID partner in elections support. "By making sure that political parties engage with their membership and also reach out to citizens to identify the issues so that once in power, we help ensure those issues are addressed in a meaningful way."

At the end of the day, the U.S. government, through its USAID activities, wants to help Nigeria operate on the basic tenets of what democracy is, said Barnes. That consists of ensuring free and fair elections, that parties run their affairs without interference from government officials, and that INEC has the necessary resources to conduct, free fair and transparent elections.

"I believe in the power of the people to elect their leaders," said 2Baba. "I also believe the process of elections should be peaceful and civilized. Otherwise, we stand to lose a lot."

More on USAID elections support in Nigeria:

<https://www.usaid.gov/elections-0>

# Nigerian Youth 'Not Too Young To Run' For Office

## President Signs USAID-Supported Bill Into Law

by Zack Taylor

The two-year journey of a bill supported by Nigeria's civil society to reduce age requirements for running for legislative and executive offices through Nigeria's National Assembly ended earlier this year with President Muhammadu Buhari signing the "Not Too Young to Run" Bill into law.

The new statute reduces the minimum age from 30 to 25 years to run for legislative seats, and from 40 to 35 to run for presidency, representing the first time the 1999 Nigerian Constitution will be amended to broaden youth participation in elections into public offices.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the British Department for International Development (DfID), contributed to the success of the campaign through advocacy capacity building for campaign coordinators in all 36 states

and extensive public advocacy.

"As the realization of the final step in the . . . campaign draws nearer, young Nigerians who propelled this bill to the desk of the president are eager for their opportunity to lead," one activist for the new law wrote shortly before the bill passed through the National Assembly.

Through implementing partner National Democratic Institute (NDI) with co-funding from DfID, USAID played a critical role in training and mobilizing Not Too Young to Run coordinators in each of Nigeria's 36 states, sponsoring "National Days of Action" on the issue and reaching out to press across the country.

The movement was initially hatched by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), a Nigerian civil society nonprofit dedicated to youth empowerment and mobilization for political participation, transparency, and accountability.

YIAGA initially reached out to NDI back in 2016 to seek partnership to review the national youth policy, but this soon blossomed into full-on advocacy for a constitutional amendment that would attract more youth to the political fold.

As the campaign blossomed into an all-out movement, YIAGA sought out legislative champions like Senator Jonathan Zwingina, who shared important strategies and tactics on how best to sell the 'Not Too Young To Run' agenda to legislators. Other critical steps included training in strategic communications to develop messaging, and training for media interviews.

Through NDI, USAID advised YIAGA to write and personally reach every state house of assembly member through state coordinators, pitch the idea for the amendment, and track the responses of the various legislators.

In the final stage of the campaign, YIAGA appealed heavily to President Buhari on different fronts including a march on the presidential villa and direct advocacy with contacts within the administration to lobby the president to give his assent.

With the bill now signed into law, the campaign has shifted into a "Ready to Run" program to help build capacity of youth candidates to run for office in the 2019 elections, giving the young Nigerians who propelled this bill to the desk of the president the opportunity to lead they had worked so hard for.

President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Not Too Young To Run bill into law in May 2018 as youth advocates looked on





# EducationUSA 2018 College Fair

By Fatima Musa Lawan and Anjolaoluwa Akinmade - EducationUSA Lagos Interns



A cross section of the participants of the Fair at the MUSON Center



Some of the EducationUSA Volunteers who helped make the fair a success

It was the culmination of considerable dialogue and produced a wealth of information. It was the much-awaited 19th EducationUSA Annual College Fair, and it was the most successful so far. The fair was held from the 24th – 27th of September, 2018 at the MUSON Centre and the Supreme Education Foundation in Lagos for two days, then moved to Abuja for two days at the Sheraton Hotel and two high schools: Loyola Jesuit College and International High School.

Forty three U.S. college admissions representatives from a wide range of two and four year colleges were present, including many first timers such as Monroe College, the University of South Alabama, Drew University and Bucks County Community College. Students and teachers came representing public and private Nigerian secondary schools such as

Queen's College, Louisville Girls High School, Corona Secondary School, Kings College, Loyola Jesuit College and many others. This year, for the first time, Lagos also held a graduate fair due to the demand from this demographic for credible information about studying in the U.S.

The four day College Fair presented a wonderful opportunity for students, teachers, and counselors to learn more about the application process and criteria for admission into U.S. higher education institutions. Admissions officers shared information on the financial aid offered by their respective universities and the uniqueness of each of their campuses. Students also learnt about the career benefits a U.S. education could offer.

Each day's fair began with a general session where the attendees were introduced to the benefits of a U.S.

education. A panel of notable U.S. college alumni and admissions officers delivered insightful speeches on the importance of a tertiary education and the prestige and generosity generally associated with American universities. The plenary session then broke into smaller sessions on The Five Steps to U.S. Study and U.S. student visa applications. After these breakout sessions, admissions officers had an opportunity to continue to interact with the over 4,000 prospective undergraduate and graduate students who attended in both locations.

The amount of effort that goes into planning an event as grand as the EducationUSA Nigeria College Fair is tremendous but very worthwhile. All of the individuals who attended left the Fair grateful for EducationUSA's efforts to promote greater access to information about the opportunities that abound in U.S. higher education.

# MAKOKO

## *Ambassador Symington Meets Makoko Schoolkids, Community Leaders, Stresses Importance of Education*

*by Ibrahim Aliyu*

**O**n November 4, 2018, United States Ambassador W. Stuart Symington visited the Makoko community in Lagos. During his visit, he met with the Director of 'Slum2School Africa', Mr. Otto Orondaam, a 2016 Mandela Washington Fellow. 'Slum2School Africa' is a volunteer-driven NGO that provides instructional materials, health and psycho-social support for dozens of Makoko schoolkids.

Ambassador Symington engaged the children involved in Slum2School and inquired about their career aspirations. He further emphasized the benefits of education, acquiring vocational skills and volunteerism.

"You are not just learning for yourself; you are learning for all of us. One of you will discover a cure for a disease. Another person will find a way to encourage farmers and herders to

live in peace," he remarked during his interactive session with the school kids.

He also met with Makoko's community leaders, followed by a guided canoe tour of the neighborhood. Makoko is an impoverished area along the Lagos lagoon where houses, shops, and churches sit atop stilts above the water of the lagoon. Traditionally, the principal source of work is fishing or connected to fishing. Slum2School Africa is helping to offer a different future for the community's children.

Explaining his purpose of visiting the Makoko community, Ambassador Symington said, "This is a pretty good time; when people are talking about politics, to think about people and the future of youths in Nigeria. I wanted to underscore not just the importance of education but I wanted to underscore the importance of the kinds of skills people are learning."

Ambassador Symington speaks to the Makoko schoolkids as Otto Orondaam of Slum2School looks on



# 2018 Ake Arts and Books Festival in Lagos

by Temitayo Famutimi



Public Affairs Officer, Russell Brooks delivering remarks during the opening ceremony of the festival

The US Mission in Nigeria supported the 2018 Ake Arts and Books Festival in Lagos. In its 6th year, this year's Festival, with the theme "Fantastical Futures", was held October 25-28. The annual event showcases the best of contemporary African literature, poetry, music, art, film, and theatre. Thirteen American writers took part including Elizabeth Bird, Professor of Anthropology at the University of South Florida; Mona Eltahawy, New York-based columnist and international public speaker; Nnedi Okorafor, award-winning novelist and professor at the University of Buffalo; and Tochi Onyebuchi, author of the widely-acclaimed fantasy "Beasts Made of Night." Additionally, visiting U.S. Arts Envoy Wanjiru Kamuyu performed a dance, "Portrait in Red," at the Festival.

Delivering remarks at the opening, U.S. Consulate Public Affairs Officer Russell Brooks expressed admiration for the creative abilities of Nigerians across various forms of human endeavor. The opening ceremony was attended by Nigeria's Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo along with several diplomats and a broad range of the creative community. The visiting artistes also joined local colleagues on visits to local schools to inspire young people to achieve their dreams.

Festival convener, Lola Shoneyin is an alumna of the prestigious U. S. government funded Iowa Writers Program.



Visiting U.S. Arts Envoy, Wanjiru Kamuyu delivering a dance performance



Cross-section of VIP guests including Vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo and Ake Festival convener, Lola Shoneyin (far left)

# NaijaGEMs Comes to Lagos

by Russell Brooks

This year's 9th edition of the Lagos Photo Festival drew 22 artists from 18 countries under the theme, "Time Has Gone." In addition, for the first time, the festival was female-dominated featuring four female curators: Eva Barois De Caemel, Wunika Mukan, Charlotte Langhorst, and Valentine Umansky whose intent was to investigate the diversity that time encompasses.

The Festival, which ran from October 27 through November 15, was organized by the African Artists Foundation and sponsored by the Mike Adenuga Centre, National Geographic, U.S. Consulate in Lagos, British Council, and the Ford Foundation.

The Lagos Photo Festival is known as a purveyor of the development and education of contemporary

photography in Africa through its mentorships and cross-cultural collaborations with indigenous and international artists. Lagos Photo takes pride in being the first international arts festival of photography in Nigeria.

The U.S. Consulate was pleased to be able to include its NaijaGEMs exhibition in the Festival. The collection of 50 photographs representing some of Nigeria's most beautiful scenery was the product of an online contest sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Abuja.

The contest itself was born out of a notion advanced by Ambassador Stuart Symington, after he visited all 36 states in Nigeria. He said more Nigerians should have the same opportunity as he to view the natural beauty of Nigeria, its waterfalls, rock formations, fauna, and flora. He said anyone who does is certain to say "Wow." NaijaGEMs gave Nigerian photographers the chance to offer their impressions of Nigeria and share them with their countrymen.

Lagos Public Affairs Officer Russell Brooks highlighted the U.S. Mission's support for creative artistic expression and key cultural institutions in Nigeria during the Festival's soft opening. He also suggested NaijaGEMs would help change the narrative about Nigeria by exposing the wonders of the country and its people.

NaijaGEMs was first exhibited in Abuja in July at Thought Pyramid. The winners were presented their prizes and the top 50 photos remained on display in the gallery for a week.

It was always the intention of the U.S. Mission to share the photos as widely as possible and sought avenues to exhibit the collection in other parts of the country. The Lagos Photo Festival offered such an opportunity.



*Festival convener, Azu Nwagbogu, and Charlotte Langhorst look on while PAO, Russell Brooks delivers remarks*



*Assistant Director of African Artists' Foundation, Charlotte Langhorst addresses the audience*



# The Citizen's Platform

by Aisha Shehu

Nigeria is typically led by the older generation despite a youth bulge and an increasingly young population demographic. This is believed to have led to a lack of interest and under-participation of young people in governance issues. However, as social media and online forums exert growing influence, many young people are using such platforms to express their views on governance and as a medium to challenge the status quo. The power unleashed by these platforms has recently prompted reactions by top government officials due to public pressure; served to promote transparency among elected officials; and brought cutting-edge news and information to a wide range of young audiences thereby sparking debate that lead to action.

A prominent movement driven largely via online platforms is the 'Not Too Young To Run' campaign that resulted in a constitutional change on the age of eligibility to contest for elected office. The movement spurred national

interest among youth in democracy and governance as evidenced by the numbers who sought party tickets during the September 2018 primary elections. It is thus apparent that it is essential to leverage young people's ever increasing online presence to disseminate knowledge and resources that further promote active citizenship and civic participation.

It is against this backdrop that the Aspilos Foundation, with support from the U.S. Embassy, seeks to engage young people aged 18-35 years for its Citizen's Platform project. The project supports the Embassy's goal to promote stronger democratic institutions through active participation of citizens and civil society. Piloting in Kano State with about 1000 young people, the Foundation's team will provide training targeting youth on active citizenship, democracy and good governance, with practical approaches to promote a credible democratic process during the 2019 general elections.

The project as a whole is designed to empower young people to help ensure

the integrity of the electoral process and that it is conducted in a peaceful, free and fair manner. The project will also engage stakeholders such as security agencies, the National Youth Service Corps, Association of Local Government Chairmen, traditional and faith-based institutions, as well as influential organizational bodies such as the National Union of Road Transport Workers and Market Women Associations.

Beyond the important role of contributing to democratic electoral processes, the online platform will also serve as a real-time accountability check on the activities of elected officials. The Citizen's Platform targets young people aged 18-35 years from all 36 states of Nigeria to spread knowledge about democratic governance and their active engagement in civic life. Peers will continuously share information to reinforce their collective skills on how to promote accountability and transparency from elected representatives, along with learning organizational skills to engage communities in their home locales.

## WHAT TO DO ON ELECTION DAY

1) ***Know your rights***

2) ***Hold unto your PVC***

*Don't allow anyone take it or buy it from you*

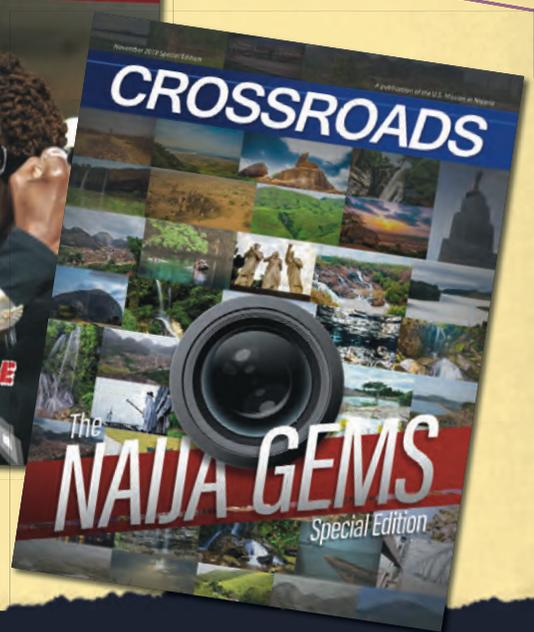
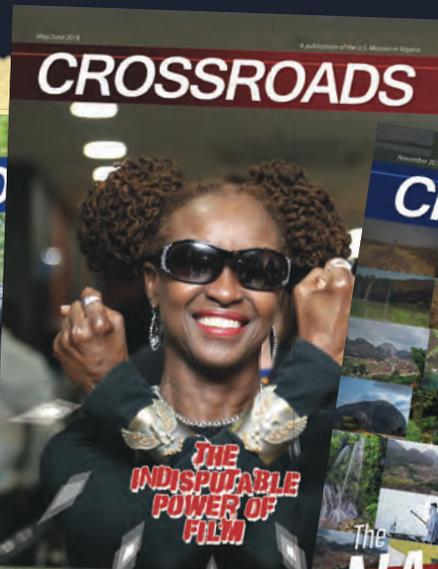
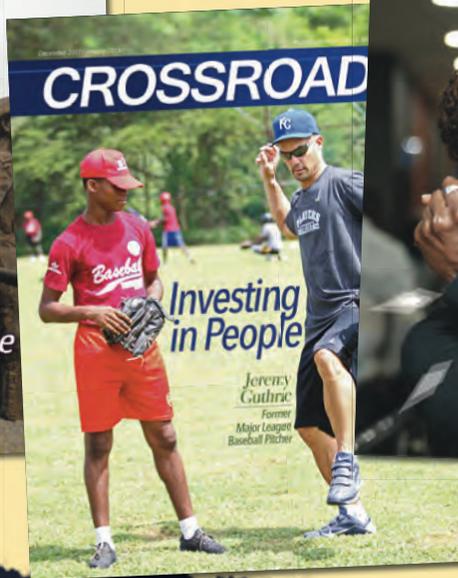
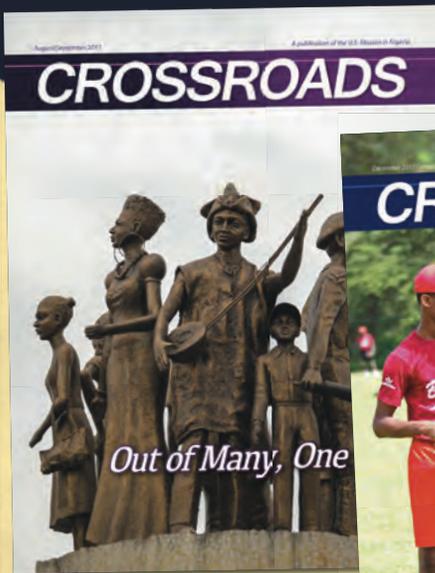
3) ***Report immediately***

*...if you have any trouble voting or see anything suspicious at your polling unit*

**- Ambassador W. Stuart Symington**

while speaking at the Vote Not Fight rally in Abuja on December 12, 2018

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