



VOL 8, NO. 2, OCTOBER 2023

# NLNG

THE MAGAZINE



Redefining Neonatal Respiratory Support

When 11 playwrights took the spotlight to thrill literary enthusiasts at CORA-NLNG Book Party 2023

Three Playwrights: Endearing literature from the storyteller, for the theatre.

## FOR THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

From neonates to centenarians

GRAND AWARD NIGHT



The Nigeria Prize for Science  
The Nigeria Prize for Literature  
The Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism

# FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the theme of the 2023 Grand Award Night is *Redefinition*. In this special edition of *NLNG The Magazine*, the Grand Award Night edition, we showcase the Nigeria Prizes and the company's avowed commitment to help build a better Nigeria, as well as its yearning to inspire thoughts and actions that move towards the redefinition of our society and being.

The 13th of October 2023 brings to a climax the 2023 cycle of the Nigeria LNG-sponsored Nigeria Prize for Science, Nigeria Prize for Literature, and Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism. The cycle started off in February 2023 with the call for entries, which closed on April 30th.

For the 2023 edition of the Nigeria Prize for Science with the theme *Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy*, the Advisory Board, ably led by our own Prof. Bart Nnaji, as always, worked towards selecting the best, as they assessed the 100 entries that were submitted. The winner of the science prize, as announced, is Professor Hippolite Amadi; for his innovative respiratory device for newborns. While congratulating Professor Amadi, I thank Prof. Nnaji and other members of the Advisory Board—Chief Dr. Nike Akande and Prof. Yusuf Abubakar—for this and their numerous contributions to truly making the Nigeria Prize for Science enjoy a deserving international appeal. Let me,

respectively, acknowledge Professors Joseph Ahanekwu, Olaitan Soyannwo, and Abdullahi Abba, all medical experts and Fellows of the Nigerian Academy of Sciences.

As judges for this year, they did not just show unparalleled dedication to the course; they displayed a high level of excellence, a tenet that is our core value and on which the prizes were founded.

The Nigeria Prize for Literature, which features the drama genre, is also in a good run, following the receipt of 143 entries and now a shortlist of three out of the long list of 11 announced earlier. The three shortlisted are Abideen Abolaji Ojomu with *The Ojuelegba Crossroads*, Obari Gomba's *Grit*, and Henry Akubuilu's *Yamatarawala – The Warrior King*. The Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism received 13 entries.

Winners of the NPL and the NPLC would be announced at the Grand Award Night. We appreciate the work of the NPL Advisory Board led by Prof. Akachi Ezeigbo. The other board members are Prof. Olu Obafemi and Prof. Ahmed Yerima. Thanks also to the judges, Prof. Ameh Dennis Akoh, Prof. Osita Catherine Ezenwanebe, and the Academy of Letters, for their commitment to literary excellence in Nigeria.

For more details on this and other updates on the Nigeria Prize for Literature, the Nigeria Prize for Science, and the Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism, please check the Prizes website at [www.thenigeriaprizes.org](http://www.thenigeriaprizes.org).

Enjoy your read.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Odeh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

GM, External Relations and Sustainable Development, NLNG

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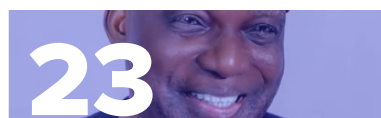
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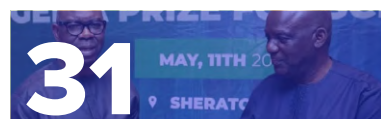
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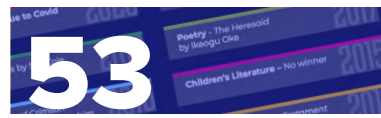
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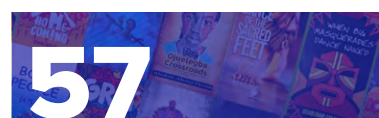
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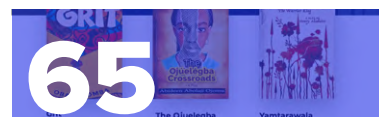
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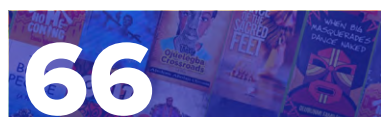
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Re-  
definition



# FOR THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

From neonates to centenarians

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By **Titi Horsfall**  
Head, Editorial and Digital Content (NLNG)



The term neonate refers to a newborn baby, typically within the first 28 days of life. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reckons that “the chances of survival from birth varies widely depending on where a child is born. Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest neonatal mortality rate in 2020 at 27 (25-32) deaths per 1000 live births, followed by central and southern Asia with 23 (21-25) deaths per 1000 live births. As such, a child born in sub-Saharan Africa is 10 times more adversely susceptible than a child born in a high-income country.

When NLNG released the theme for the 2023 Nigeria Prize for Science – Innovations in the Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy, Company opened the portals to critical thought on healthcare in Nigeria. Its Hospital Support Programme was already garnering national and international appeal, by way of Company’s corporate social responsibility in the area of health.

When the announcement of the winner of the Nigeria Prize for Science was announced by the Chairman of the NPS Advisory Board, Professor Bart Nnaji, the winning innovation, was welcomed with great joy. NLNG, in its health intervention, had come full circle, and all-inclusive, ensuring that even the most vulnerable in society, had a chance at health, and indeed, a chance at life.

Professor Hippolite Amadi’s PoliteheartCPAP is an improvement to an existing/imported non-invasive neonatal ventilator model, as it provides access to ventilators and oxygen delivery simultaneously to neonates at an extremely reduced cost of NGN750,000 as against NGN6.5 million for the existing device with comparable and better efficiency.

Professor Amadi is a visiting professor of Medical Engineering and Technology at Imperial College London with a special interest in the development of affordable medical systems. Prior to

his work at Imperial College, he was a professor of Medical Technology at Imo State University.

The neonatal period is the first four weeks of an infant’s life, whether the baby was carried to term or born prematurely. During this period, newborns are observed closely in the first few hours of life, particularly in the case of premature births or if there were complications during delivery. Medical personnel examine neonates to assess health conditions at the time of birth and intervene where life support is needed. For instance, the availability of a mechanical assistive device to drive the breathing process and the provision of supplemental oxygen to curtail breathing difficulties and aid adaption into the new world outside of the mother’s womb.



The PoliteheartCPAP machine

Professor Hippolite Amadi’s ground-breaking respiratory technologies for newborns, consists of a solar energy powered non-invasive Neonatal Ventilator, an Oxygen Delivery Blender System, and an Oxygen Splitter System. The innovations have been verified by various Nigerian hospitals, having undergone testing, and shown to be cost-effective, when compared to available alternatives.

The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Ahmed Bola

Tinubu, has conveyed his congratulations to the winner of the 2023 NLNG Prize for Science. He was delighted that *‘the Nigerian scientist’s innovation has already reduced neonatal care costs significantly and saved lives in verified hospitals that have adopted the use of the solar-powered neonatal ventilator.’*

He therefore commended Amadi *‘for leveraging his extensive background in medical engineering and technology, with a special focus on affordable medical systems, for the betterment, progress, and benefit of Nigerians and humanity in general,’ while noting that ‘this significant work by this great Nigerian scientist will contribute to keeping more Nigerian children alive after birth and preparing them for a better future as positive changemakers and influencers both at home and abroad.’*

In the same vein, the U.S Mission in Nigeria released this statement: “Congratulations to Nigerian Prof. Hippolite Amadi for winning the \$100,000 Nigerian Prize for Science 2023; for pioneering neonatal care innovations! We recognize his ground-breaking design of solar-powered respiratory equipment, to help save newborn lives in Nigeria and beyond.”

Chief Uche Nnaji, The Nigerian Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, has equally, extended his

warmest congratulations to Prof Amadi, on the “remarkable achievement as the 2023 edition of The Nigeria Prize for Science winner.” According to him, Amadi’s pioneering work in respiratory technologies, focusing on saving newborn babies’ lives, has earned him the prestigious accolade and the ministry’s profound admiration and gratitude. The Ministry is, therefore, eager to collaborate with Prof Amadi in furthering the ground-breaking research and facilitating its application for the benefit of the Nigerian people.

Earlier, while delivering the judges’ verdict for the 2023 NPS, Professor Bart Nnaji stated that the work of Prof Amadi has not only significantly advanced neonatal care in Nigeria and similar countries, but it has also improved access and lowered the cost of neonatal care by causing an observed reduction in the market prices of the competing and existing devices. According to Prof Nnaji, the entry showcased three technological innovations aimed at saving the lives of neonates by making the delivery of oxygen cheap and easy. The first innovation is the non-invasive Neonatal Ventilator, a key invention (The Politeheart bubble CPAP device) for continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) ventilation of very low-birth-weight neonates, a feasible alternative to the readily available improvised bubble CPAP (IBCPAP) in cost-constrained settings. The second and third innovations are the Oxygen Delivery Blender System, which allows for the safe delivery of oxygen without the danger of toxicity, and the Oxygen Splitter System, which allows for the use of a shared source of oxygen to many neonates at a time, in situations where piped oxygen is not available.

Mr Andy Odeh, the NLNG General Manager for External Relations and

Sustainable Development was emphatic when he remarked, that Nigeria LNG celebrates the impact that innovation can have in enhancing healthcare therapy and safeguarding the future of countless new-borns. Speaking at the press conference where the Science prize winner was announced, he said, “we are honoured and deeply moved by the judges’ decision to recognize the ground-breaking innovation in respiratory technology that has been awarded the Nigeria Prize for Science in 2023. This invention not only represents a remarkable leap forward in medical science but also serves as a beacon of hope for the most vulnerable among us - our neonates.”

*In implementing our communication strategy for the 2023 NPS, I had been in constant connect with Professor Amadi. When he called, as early as 7am on a particular morning, one could tell that he was full of joy for Nigeria’s neonates.*

*Professor Amadi exclaimed about the real-life situation which the NLNG crew had witnessed in a neoroom (a miniaturised neonatal care facility) he had set up at a village centre situated in the outskirts of Calabar at the Calabar Women and Children Hospital (CWCH).*

*“Today, the neonate is almost two days old. The baby was born massively distressed! We have stabilised the baby, and this morning, I am about going on my ward round to check on the baby.”*

*Professor Amadi was at that moment, in his office in the Imperial College London, and was about going on a ward round in a small village in Calabar. Prof Amadi’s remote intervention and connection with neonates in the hinterlands became factual. Earlier, Joel Benson who leads the video documentary charge, was updating on the coverage of*

*Professor Amadi’s work. A crew was in London to meet up with a 2nd October 2023 appointment, and simultaneously to cover Prof’s one-in-a-kind neoroom in Calabar. It so happened that our crew had arrived Calabar at a time when Prof Amadi’s neonatal innovation would be in critical need.*

*Unknown to all, a pregnant woman in that village had set her heart to have her baby on the 1st of October; a day that coincides with the Independence Day celebration of Nigeria. However, when she was delivered of her baby, the medical team on ground grappled with*



The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, has conveyed his congratulations to the winner of the 2023 NLNG Prize for Science. He was delighted that ‘*the Nigerian scientist’s innovation has already reduced neonatal care costs significantly and saved lives in verified hospitals that have adopted the use of the solar-powered neonatal ventilator.*’

*her premature neonate that was born massively distressed. Professor Amadi was quickly called in, and by sheer fate, our crew was on ground, in that village, to see first-hand, Professor Amadi’s technology put to good use.*

*I engaged Professor Amadi with a few questions.*

**Congratulations Professor Amadi, for the intervention on the baby! Clearly, this was what you had in mind when you created the neoroom.**

Exactly so! The Nigerian healthcare

system for the newborn; the way it is structured is part of the problem of high neonatal mortality rate. That is, neonatal intervention is tied around the consultants and the professors, because

it is a highly specialised aspect of patient intervention. So in other words, it is difficult, on the premise of how Nigeria is today, to do neonatology in the village, at the primary healthcare



level, and secondary healthcare. Every needy neonate is being rushed to the tertiary hospitals. It is not even that the tertiary is well equipped and well-funded. Many of these babies that would travel this journey, would either die on the way, or by the time they get to the tertiary institutions, they would be moribund. This has been the practice, and it is not changing because people are not looking closely to these salient issues. But in my practice, I have identified all the contributors of high neonatal mortality rate in Nigeria, including dysfunctional buildings in the context of neonatal safety. I have published extensively because I have identified and surrounded all the problems. I have studied all the problems. I have discussed the aetiology of so many of the problems and I have created antidotes. I have created solutions, and I have published. So, it is either this generation of Nigerians would look into what I have provided and solve the problem, or the next generation would do it. My happiness is that I have published everything. Everything is in the public domain. It is a completed package.

I discovered that when these babies journey seeking intervention, they get worse. I had to develop a slogan (my mantra) for the best way to solve the problem of neonatology in Nigeria – knowing that over 66% of the needy babies seeking intervention are located around primary centres and secondary centres, yet neonatal intervention is not happening around those places. So, I developed a slogan that we should “take our medicine to them, rather than ask them to come to our medicine.” That is the best way to do it. And one cannot take our medicine to them, because of the well-known bottlenecks within the Nigerian space. There are so many bottlenecks. Number one, the professors are not there, the consultants are not there, and they will not relocate to the villages. Can we create a kind of technology that can make it possible to do neonatology in the village and stop

the treacherous neonatal transport often undertaken? These are some of the bottlenecks. The consultants might not be there, of course. The senior medical officers would not be there. Senior consultant nurses would not be there. Professors would not be there. Electricity would not be there, and the transport to make it, is actually zero. So, how can we create things that can work in the village? When people look at some of these problems, they say it is impossible to solve neonatology in the village, but this is why science and technology are there. It is to create solutions for the impossible scenarios. This is what I have achieved, based on my work in the past twenty-five years.

My idea of creating a solution that would implement taking our medicine to them, was to create what I called the neoroom. ‘Neo’ as in neonate, and ‘room’ as in a small space. I created something in a local centre, that does not require a professor, or a big consultant. It just requires a basic knowledgeable nurse, medical officer and medical assistant, to operate. So, the devices that I create, would be devices that could be easily used. These devices like the PoliteheartCPAP machine. Ventilating a baby or doing a proper scientific-grade respiratory support is a high-class medicine. That is the way it is looked at. But I have now brought it to the lowest state, where a basic nurse would be able to treat a baby with such a machine and deliver life to that baby. Hence, creating devices that would enable them to manage neonates in faraway hinterlands. They can use one machine (like an oxygen concentrator) to generate oxygen and distribute that oxygen in the simplest technique I innovated. That is what the ‘politeoxygen splitter system (PSS)’ is doing. So that with one oxygen source and harvesting energy from the sun to run the concentrator, nurses and medical assistants can share the oxygen being produced to up to eight babies, simultaneously.

**This is what was achieved in the outskirts of Calabar, as a case in point, just a few days ago.**

From here in the UK, I would be doing my rounds on that baby by 9 O’clock this morning, some minutes from now as we speak. I am seeing the baby remotely to offer expert support to the local staff on ground. What really happens is that the basic nurses and medical officers that are there, would wait for me to come in remotely and examine the neonate.

It is a very simple technology. The mobile phone technology. They use zoom video conferencing on mobile phone, or WhatsApp video. They log on their devices into my Imperial College zoom-office, and I would, through their devices’ windows on my computer, see the patient and all the numbers, and I would tell them do this, or do that. By so doing and working with me remotely, they are all improving on their skills. But you see, the very interesting thing is that right there in the village, there is nothing like power cut in my centres. The centre doesn’t blink from notorious Nigerian power cuts, such that even a Teaching Hospital would refer a baby to my village centre. Isn’t that ridiculous? But anyway, that is my dream. Even what NLNG is celebrating is only 23% of the medicine that I have created in Nigeria.

**To what extent does neonatal care determine overall life expectancy? The caregiving at birth, to what extent does it impact life expectancy to a hundred years. Is there any correlation?**

Of course, there is a big correlation. The first is that, when you do not have a good neonatal intervention, the baby would die at infancy. You can’t even be talking about seventy or hundred years if you do not have basic intervention at birth. Many babies in Nigeria are born with some of these problems. If you do

not have effective neonatal intervention, the baby dies at infancy. When you talk of respiratory support for example, if there is no effective respiratory support, if the respiratory support is ineffective, where they do not have ventilators – what they do is give these babies pure oxygen from oxygen cylinders or oxygen concentrators. Pure oxygen may save the baby now but would make the baby moribund tomorrow. This is because the baby could develop what is called retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), which is a huge problem in Nigeria today. ROP could result when babies were intoxicated early in life, by the unblended oxygen they received during such therapy. Simply put, such neonates had excess oxygen put in their tissues, and this affects the retina of the eyes and all that. So, quality of life and life expectancy drops.

There is also another problem, which direct delivery of oxygen raises, which is in one of my publications. That is what we call, severe iatrogenic hypothermia of internal organs. This condition kills the babies, especially extremely preterm neonates. And when the baby dies, most of the time, the doctors don't know exactly what killed the baby. If they used the wrong ventilator that would not appropriately warm the air that the baby is breathing, the respiratory support gas which is oxygen that has been pre-bubbled in water for humidification, these neonates could die of severe hypothermia of internal organs. This is because oxygen stored in pressurised cylinders drops below room temperature and could be as cold as 22°C during the night. Therefore, when they pass this through the water-based humidifier and deliver directly to the neonate's lungs, thermal exchange occurs via the blood capillaries, unwittingly chilling down the circulating blood (the opposite of what should be happening). The cold blood stream departing from the lungs continues its travel course and gets distributed throughout the internal organs of the baby, subjecting these to hypothermia. The hypothermic internal organs would not function efficiently and

begin to shut down. This is iatrogenic hypothermia of internal organs. It is not easily measured superficially. As such the clinicians don't even know what is going on because, superficially, the body may be manifesting good body temperature, but internally, because of the sub temperature gas that has been given to the baby, neonate chills down internally. Afterwards unwittingly, the clinicians would blame another morbidity for killing the neonate. Some of these sciences are described in my journal publications. With this knowledge, the poor



*My work impacts every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Any family, where there is the cry of a baby in Nigeria, my work impacts. So, people that are enlightened should educate those that are not. Demand for your right, and we can solve this problem together.*

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practices have been corrected through the devices that I am developing. This is because it is not just enough talking about the science of the problems, or the neonatal gaps. It is not enough. When you make people understand these sciences, one should also try to create the appropriate solutions to fill in that gap. That's why I love what NLNG is doing now – amplifying what I had been up to in the last quarter of a century – although NLNG never knew about the bigger story when they stumbled into my work via this award.

I want to ride on the back of NLNG to let Nigerians know that we have huge problems to solve. The fact that Nigeria buries more babies than any other country in the world every day, is a big shame already. It is a big shame on the

big stage. Yet we have intellectuals and academics in Nigeria. We can't pretend that we don't know that we have a big shame on the global stage. It is either Nigerians look inwards and use solutions that we can manage, solutions that are not foreign to us and solve our problems, rather than chasing developed countries all over the place. They also have their own problems to solve. If Africans can't solve their problems, they can forget about it. Africans ought to understand their own problems better than anyone from any other continent. If you empower an African mind, he will create a better solution to solve his problem. When you look inwards, you use your own currency to solve your problem. But when you are looking outside, you are using a foreign currency which you don't even have. And the problem would remain.

So, I am glad that your crew wanted to capture that magic of village consulting, because that was what they captured – the guys that are making the documentary. They were able to cover my first ward round on the neonate, at the time the baby was less than 12 hours old, and they covered it. Your audio-visual crew was here in my office, in Imperial College London, and simultaneously, also in the village centre near Calabar. I am sure, if they do a good job with the documentary, you guys would be proud of it. That it is possible for me to be here in London, and saving babies in the village centre using devices that most hospitals in Nigeria don't have. And these devices are being operated by basic-trained nurses.

**As witnessed in the Calabar centre, communication technology has played a major role in providing neonatal care for neonates in remote locations.**

Yes. In this case, in a village at the outskirts of Calabar. That's what I am talking about. At that first ward-round, the neonate was having massive instability. Your camera crew was able to pick up our intervention. In my technique of village remote consulting, the nurse



in charge would be there with other supporting and medical officers. This is a real-time two-way communication and operational event when I would be working, directing on what to do based on my audio-visual observations and the numbers as revealed by the various monitors on the neonate, including the politeheartCPAP and the PSS.

Currently, the neonate in question is improving and thriving. I am excited about the whole thing. I am very much excited. It is just that Nigerians don't really know what is going on. All these things are hidden behind the four walls of medical practice in Nigeria. Many Nigerian babies are dying of preventable causes, but parents don't even know that these babies could be saved because everything is hidden behind the walls of medical practice, and it is wrong.

In this country where I live (the UK), you don't kill any baby out of negligence and get away with it. It is either you quit medicine, or you save that baby. But in Nigeria, anyone can do anything and get away with it. But if my work is to give the ordinary parent in Nigeria the power to demand for the right to life for their neonates, then I have succeeded.

I was asked about the impact of my work. It is not a gainsaying that my work is important. My work impacts every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Any family, where there is the cry of a baby in Nigeria, my work impacts. So, people that are enlightened should educate those that are not. Demand for your right, and we can solve this problem together. Babies that are born in Nigeria would live. I have written a book, 'Born to Live Not to Die' because I was demanding for the right of babies to live. People do not know the pains of not being able to breathe. For people that don't know the pains, they could just have appreciated it a little bit with George Floyd, who was crying 'I can't breathe, I can't breathe.' It became a world slogan. Or maybe during

the Covid-19 time when adults could not breathe. At that time, more than 11 Nigerian parastatals and agencies, were calling on me, from both the state and federal government offices. You know what they were demanding? 'Professor we heard that you made ventilators for neonates. Can you give us ventilators to help with Covid?' And to every one of them, I answered the same way. I told them the ventilators I had made, were to save newborn babies, not adults. I would not for now, make any ventilators for any adult in Nigeria. I want our Nigerian adults to test what it feels like not to be able to breathe so that the next time I tell them that babies can't breathe, they would ask me, 'what should we do to help?'

I have been crying that babies can't breathe for more than twenty years in Nigeria. The adults were not paying attention to me. Some of them even wanted me to convert some of the machines I already had in stock for babies, so that they would use it for themselves. I told them, never. Let adults observe and test what it feels like when one cannot breathe, then they would now know what these babies suffer. The next time, when I say babies can't breathe, the adult would ask me, "Professor, what can we do to help them to breathe?"

Covid-19 has come and gone. Since, then, how many Nigerian adults have come to ask me, "what else can we do to help babies breathe? – none." Immediately Covid-19 was over, they all got busy with what they were doing before, chasing money all over the place. Any way Titi, if you turn me in on this subject, you can't go. Because this is my life. I don't need to check my notes to know what is going on in the Nigerian scene. Thank God for what you guys are doing, Hopefully, this is the beginning of the victory. It is not the victory yet, but it is the beginning.

**How were you able to collaborate on the Nigerian Scene, with your London-based university, in the develop-**

### **ment of proofs for your invention?**

First, let me state that at the heart of my role as an academic, is the development of my students. That is foremost for any university, especially, one with very high ideals as the Imperial College, London, where I did my PHD in Bioengineering, subsequently employed in the same Department and progressed to eventually become a professor focussing on development of frugal medical technologies for resource-limited settings. My teaching endeavour was purely implemented overseas impacting postgraduate medical doctors, nurses, and technicians at the low-resource centres where my research was carried out.

In the course of teaching, I began creating the concept of the respiratory device in addition to other aspects of neonatal intervention I had already created. Such a process involves the definition of the sciences, identification of the problems and then publishing what were the core issues with the problems. Thereafter, I started developing the antidotes to those problems. When I believed I had done enough, I needed to put everything together, and test.

I told my department (Bioengineering) at Imperial College that I needed a central location in Nigeria where the conceptualisation and proof of concept could be governed within Nigeria. This suggestion materialised in 2013. I also felt that I would be able to develop capacity in young people in Nigeria, so that the technology could continue with the young students after my retirement. To this end, invitation was given to Nigerian universities which the Imperial College felt could collaborate with it, in the development of this scheme. There was a long process of determining which university in Nigeria would be selected. I, being an indigene of Imo State, proposed to the Imperial College London, that the Imo State University should be given the opportunity to ring-fence this technology in Nigeria for the development of the proof-of-concept of

the collective Neonatal Rescue Scheme (NRS).

Following formal evaluation and approval, the Imo State University was invited to the Imperial College to broker the agreement, which was to take effect from October 2014, and last for three years in the first instance. Upon assumption in Imo State, I was accorded a professorial chair, and was also honorary consultant at the Imo State University Teaching Hospital. The model of the agreement also involved my going to the university, to seek for young students and develop their vision of saving lives. Within the first year, another opportunity opened up in Yobe State, to build the same proof of concept, with the blueprint of NRS that was now with the Imo State University. The Imo project was, however, inconclusive.

Considering that a proof of concept was essentially required in the field of Medicine to determine the effectiveness

of an innovation, I was truly glad when the opportunity opened in Yobe State. The roll out of the NRS in Yobe State by the Yobe State Government is currently delayed since 2019, but nearly completed. I truly enjoyed the support of the then Commissioner of Health who was also a member of my research Lab in Nigeria. I was, about the same time (August 2016), invited to Addis Ababa to attend a conference organised for the wives of African Presidents. I was to talk to them about neonatal health in Africa. At the programme which had the wife of the Niger State Governor leading the Nigerian delegation, I was invited to visit Niger State to implement the NRS. That is how the project in Minna started. As a test run, they wanted to ensure that the babies within Minna region do not die. I created one hub centre dedicated to Minna region. As early as June 2017, the Amina Centre started operations. After functioning for one year, we were able to generate data that I could take

to medical conferences to justify the invention.

Later, we were able to determine the outcome of the NRS package in Minna, through a 5-year impact assessment at the end of 2022. The impact studies revealed that neonatal mortality in Minna had fallen from 90% to 4% as published by the Journal of Neonatal Nursing in 2023. This is what Global Health has been discussing.

**Thank you, Professor Amadi, for this conversation. Your commitment to the health of Nigerian babies rightly fits into NLNG's intervention in the Nigerian health sector, through the NLNG Hospital Support Programme. With this innovation, NLNG's Hospital Support Program gets a further boost, in catering for all Nigerians, from neonates to centenarians.**

## The NLNG Hospital Support Program

The Hospital Support Program consists of NLNG's health intervention projects across twelve university teaching hospitals in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and Abuja. The interventions were arrived at, following joint reviews and alignment with the management of the selected hospitals. The twelve beneficiary hospitals were selected based on:

- Ensuring spread across the six geopolitical zones (minimum of one hospital in each zone).
- Providing a special status for the South-South zone as NLNG's host area: one hospital per State.
- Providing special consideration to Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory: one hospital.
- Providing higher consideration for

hospitals in States with higher population per zone.

- Exemption of hospitals in States with universities that benefited from the NLNG University Support Programme (USP).

To formalise its execution, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NLNG and each teaching hospital, setting out the framework for delivery of the project, was signed. The project execution was split into two phases for delivery between 2022 and 2024, with an approved cost of US\$500,000 per location, and total cost of US\$6 Million for the program.

As part of governance for the execution,

monitoring, and delivery, Project Steering Committees (PSCs) were constituted comprising management and technical teams from the universities and NLNG.

### Phase 1

The university teaching hospitals in the initial roll out of NLNG's Hospital Support Programme include: The Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH), University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH) and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH). All the projects in these institutions have been finalised and commissioned.





### **Maternity Centre at the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH)**

**Commissioned:** 18th November 2022

The Maternity Centre consists of a 10-bed delivery suite, a 10-bed post-natal ward, two operating theatres, 10-bed Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU), consulting rooms, doctors and nurses' rooms, side laboratory, pharmacy, reception, medical records, CCTV system, Ultrasound scan room, and other administrative offices and rooms.



### **Intensive Care Unit at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital**

**Commissioned:** 22nd November 2022

The ICU Building is a one-storey building (ground and first floors). The building, among other associated facilities, includes a six-bed Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and a four-bed renal dialysis unit. that is connected to the existing operating theatre.



### **Obstetrics and Gynaecology Ward (Block C) of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH)**

**Commissioned:** 27th March 2023

The Lagos State University Teaching Hospital renovated and reequipped the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Ward (Block C); renovation, upgrade, and equipping of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology ward. 120 beds, waiting room, nurses' stations, private wards, consulting rooms, radiation room, kitchenette, sluice room, doctors, and nurses call rooms and administrative offices and rooms.



### **Occupational Therapy and Neuromodulation Rehabilitation Centre at the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH)**

**Commissioned:** 30th March 2023

The construction and equipping of an Occupational Therapy and Neuromodulation Rehabilitation Centre involved the construction of a two-winged bungalow with associated facilities such as a female ward, children's ward, nurses' station, and ward round room. The therapy wing consists of EEG room, RTMS room, ECT room, patient waiting room, recovery room, physiotherapy hall, and skill acquisition hall with associated toilet facilities. The building is also equipped with a smoke and fire alarm detection system, CCTV, and intercom systems.



**The Intensive Care Unit of the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH)**

Commissioned: 3rd April 2023

The ICU building includes a water treatment room, burn ICU, sluice room, general and nursing changing room, consulting (doctor’s call) rooms, and nursing rooms. In addition, the facility has a patient drop-off covered foyer, a waiting room, a record room, storage room, a reception, seminar hall, and toilet facilities.



**Construction & Equipping of a Neurosurgical & Stroke Centre at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH)**

Commissioned: 6th April 2023

The University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), Calabar had intervention in the construction and equipping of an 18-bed Neuro-Surgical block within the UCTH premises. The building, among other associated facilities, includes nine-bedded male and nine-bedded female wards, an operating theatre, three consulting offices, a pharmacy, two sleep-in rooms, nursing and recovery rooms, associated equipment and furniture, as well as a 30KVA solar inverter backup power supply.

**The Phase 2**

The six university teaching hospitals to benefit from the NLNG Hospital Support Programme in Phase Two are, the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital (ATBUTH), Bauchi; the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH); the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital (NAUTH), Nnewi; the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba; University of Uyo Teaching Hospital (UUTH); and the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH) in Rivers State.

The Project Steering Committee is fully engaged to deliver these within scope

and on time. Plans are in view, to sign another Memorandum of Understanding which would spread the reach of the Hospital Support Program to the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital (ATBUTH) Bauchi, the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital (NAUTH), Nnewi. The joint needs assessment will kick off with these hospitals in 2023, ahead of the MoU signing, and eventual execution in 2024.

These actions, which are taken in partnership with the relevant health

institutions, provide assurances of NLNG’s steadfast commitment to Nigeria. In addition to its health interventions, NLNG, in its sustainable development drive, has also anchored three other CSR pillars for its host communities. These are in the areas of education, infrastructure, and empowerment.





## COMMISSIONING OF A MATERNITY CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA TEACHING HOSPITAL

Address by Dr Philip Mshelbila (MD/CEO NLNG)

Nigeria LNG is a private Company that has as its vision, helping to build a better Nigeria. It is jointly owned by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (49%), Shell Gas B.V. (25.6%), TotalEnergies Gas & Electricite Holdings (15%) and ENI International N.A.N.V. sar l (10.4%).

NLNG is factual about its pursuit of interventions, initiatives or experiences that make life meaningful for Nigerians. NLNG in its sustainable development drive, has anchored four pillars for its host communities, and for Nigeria. These meaningful sustain-

able developmental initiatives are in the areas of education, infrastructure, empowerment and health.

Health, they say is wealth. We could add that health is life! If you have life, you have hope. With hope, are chances and opportunities for a sustainable and prosperous future.

In July 2021, the NLNG Board approved a National CSR Health Support Program with the objective of boosting healthcare delivery system following the COVID-19 pandemic. The program consists of health intervention projects in 12 federal univer-

sity teaching hospitals across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The approved project cost was pegged at half a million US dollars (US\$500,000) per location and amounting to a total cost of six million US dollars (US\$6 million) in total for all the locations. In arriving at the respective health support interventions per federal university teaching hospital, each of the institutions conducted a 'thorough needs assessment' to optimally deploy and utilize the amount that was allocated to them. The intervention sought by the Uni-



versity of Abuja Teaching Hospital was a Maternity Centre.

To this end, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital, signaling a kick-off of the project which was facilitated by a project steering committee consisting of management and technical teams from the University of Abuja and NLNG.

As was required, the project steering committee has managed the governance of the execution, monitoring and delivery of this Maternity Centre at the UATH. What commenced just over a year ago, following NLNG's Board approval of the Hospital Support Programme, has today, culminated in the commissioning and availability of this world class medical facility for public use.

Well-done, to all who worked assiduously, towards this manifestation.

The Maternity Centre consists of a ten-bed delivery suite, ten-bed post-natal ward, two operating theatres, ten-bed Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU), consulting rooms, doctors and nurses' rooms, side laboratory, pharmacy, reception, medical records room, ultra-

sound scan room, CCTV system and other administrative offices/rooms.

Maternal health which encompasses the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, is essentially, a basic human right. We



The Maternity Centre consists of a ten-bed delivery suite, ten-bed post-natal ward, two operating theatres, ten-bed Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU), consulting rooms, doctors and nurses' rooms, side laboratory, pharmacy, reception, medical records room, ultrasound scan room, CCTV system and other administrative offices/rooms.

are glad to partner with the University of Abuja and its stream of renowned doctors and specialists to take on the needs of pregnant women, all through the stages of fetal development, and to childbirth. We are assured that you would put this facility to the best use possible, and for every patient, you would get to the bottom of every pre-

vailing condition, using the equipment that has been provided.

Ingrained in our memory, is the medical fete, which was accomplished at the Federal Medical Centre Yola, where NLNG had donated medical equipment. When the need arose, Grace and Mercy – a set of conjoined twins and natives of Nembe in Bayelsa State, were taken by their parents to Yola, for medical intervention. The children were successfully separated, and the medical director publicly disclosed that some of the equipment used in the separation was part of the donation from NLNG. Lives were preserved!

This is NLNG's way of pushing the frontiers of primary health care. We hope the UATH Maternity Centre stands the test of time, affecting many lives and families in Abuja and beyond.

Thank you.

Dr Philip Mshelbila  
Managing Director, NLNG



Maternity Centre at the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital



Dr Philip Mshelbila, MD/CEO, NLNG, giving an address at the commissioning ceremony of the Occupational Therapy and Neuromodulation Rehabilitation Centre, Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital.

## COMMISSIONING OF THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND NEUROMODULATION REHABILITATION CENTRE AT THE AMINU KANO TEACHING HOSPITAL (AKTH)

Address By Dr Philip Mshelbila (MD, NLNG)

Considering the multiple and wide array of issues that society must contend with, Nigeria LNG took a firm position to help its home country, in the area of healthcare delivery. This resulted in NLNG's signing of the Hospital Support Programme (HSP) Phase-1 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the 24th of January 2022, and the Phase-2 MoU signing on the 20th of February 2023, with the respective medical institutions.

This is the commissioning of an Occupational Therapy and Neuromodulation Rehabilitation Centre at the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, which is part of the Phase 1 roll-out of the NLNG HSP. The project involved the construction of a two-winged bungalow with associated facilities: a female ward, children ward, nurses' station, and ward round room. The therapy wing consists

of EEG room, RTMS room, ECT room, patient waiting room, recovery room, physiotherapy hall and skill acquisition hall with associated toilet facilities. The building is also equipped with smoke & fire alarm detecting system, CCTV and intercom systems.

Why health interventions? Well, health as it is commonly appreciated, is the extent of an individual's continuing physical, emotional, mental, and social ability to cope with his or her environment. Anyone who is losing health, is on the verge of losing his or her will to live, and to be a vital member of society. NLNG, by virtue of its vision of being a globally competitive LNG Company helping to build a better Nigeria, feels the pulse of Nigerians, and yearns to support the medical field in shoring up the standard of health of the citizenry, as well as that of foreigners domiciled in Nigeria, who may wish to

access any of the facilities.

It is for this reason that NLNG took on this CSR intervention, which is urgent and vital to the lives of Nigerians. NLNG has thus signed the Phase 1 MoU to support the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH). Others in the Phase 1 scheme include – the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH).

The HSP Phase-2 MoU Signing covers the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital (UUTH); as well as the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH). I make specific mention of these hospitals, as they would in

the shortest time possible, be referenced as case studies, and lights of hope for the people they serve.

We are also taking up these responsibilities as intervention and support, because achieving universal health coverage for a nation of over 200million people, is a race against time. We hope that more organisations like us, would intervene in the healthcare delivery system, and collectively, our support would have far-reaching effect which would strengthen the medical field in Nigeria. While our intervention today takes up a slice of the financial need in our home country's health sector, we do note that for the sake of sustainability, and in anticipation of a nation that is projected to have a population of 400 million people in about 27 years or thereabout, preventive healthcare and healthy lifestyles are imperative for national wherewithal.

To this end, the call for the 2023 Nigeria Prize for Science entries has been made. The \$100,000 USD NLNG sponsored prize has as its theme, *Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy*. All, with interests and abilities linked to this theme, are kindly invited to submit their innovative concepts and practices.

I also call on healthcare institutions to be factual and robust in setting up systems that will give financial risk protection to SMEs that want to invest in healthcare, open barriers to quality and essential healthcare services and provide safe and conducive working conditions for the medical staff, amongst others.

May it be known that we are equally expectant that the facilities commissioned through the NLNG HSP, are put to the best use for the good of humanity. Having commissioned the remodelled 15-bed Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and the Maternity Centre at the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), NLNG has received positive updates on the impact the facilities are having on the lives of Nigerians. Earlier this week, an Obstetrics and Gynaecology Ward as stipulated in the MoU was commissioned in the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH).

As I conclude, let us all be reminded that health is wealth. Likewise, wisdom is also wealth. We thought it wise to partner with the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, which was founded with a mission of providing excellent services with a dedicated workforce that is fully committed to utilizing available resources judiciously, effectively and efficiently in an environment that treats patients with utmost care.

Truly, we all have a collective stake, and will continue to show our support for Nigeria's healthcare system. May Nigeria prosper, abounding in the health and wealth of its people.

Thank you.

Dr Philip Mshelbila  
Managing Director, NLNG



University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), NLNG has received positive updates on the impact the facilities are having on the lives of Nigerians. Earlier this week, an Obstetrics and Gynaecology Ward as stipulated in the MoU was commissioned in the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH).

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Mr Andy Odeh, General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development NLNG, cutting the ribbon with other dignitaries at the commissioning ceremony of the Intensive Care Unit, of the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital.

## COMMISSIONING OF THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT, OF THE NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL (NDUTH)

Goodwill Message by HM King Dr Edmund Daukoru (Chairman, NLNG Board)

In July 2021, the NLNG Board approved a National CSR Hospital Support Program. The Programme was conceived on the back of Covid-19 pandemic during which, through the NNPC, and Oil & Gas Industry Partners Covid-19 Intervention Programme, NLNG donated intensive care medical equipment to medical institutions across Nigeria.

Following the NLNG Board's approval, and in line with NLNG's vision of being a globally competitive LNG Company helping to build a better Nigeria, the Company went on to sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with twelve medical institutions across the nation, and in each of the geopolitical zones. The Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital here in Okolobiri, Bayelsa State, is one of the twelve medical institutions.

Based on the MoU with NDUTH, NLNG's health intervention is in the

construction and equipping of an Intensive Care Unit (ICU). This facility is expected to boost the services provided by the only other government medical facility, which is the Federal Medical Centre in Yenagoa. In time past, NDU had to refer critical cases to other institutions, as comprehensive and integrated approach to save lives in critical situations, were limited.

Emergency care interventions ensure that lives are saved in a timely manner, and comprehensive analysis arrived at, in good time.

To the Niger Delta University, well done for making your institution available, by partnering with NLNG. The partnership speaks of the trust that NLNG and its Board, has placed in you - in anticipation of NDUTH's best in class health care service delivery. Critically ill patients would now have credible protective care. Likewise, the medical students at the university

would have capacity to address health care delivery using world-class medical technology, for excellent treatment. I call on the people of Bayelsa State to avail themselves of the service of the NDUTH Intensive Care Unit when needed.

To the Management and staff of NLNG, I commend you for fostering the Hospital Support Programme as determined by the Board and ensuring that the Project Steering Committee comprising of NDUTH and NLNG, delivered the project in good time, and within budget. I look forward to the success of NDUTH and the medical success interventions in Bayelsa State, and across Nigeria.

God bless you all.

HM King Dr Edmund Daukoru  
Chairman, Board of NLNG

# COMMISSIONING OF THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT OF THE NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL (NDUTH)

Address by Mr Andy Odeh (GM External Relations and Sustainable Dev, NLNG)

It is a thing of honour, for Nigeria NLNG to participate in the sustainability of the Nigerian society. A situation in which NLNG moves beyond commercial interests, to take on human concerns and life-sustaining endeavours for the good of society, is an affirmation of its vision.

Please note that the 2023 theme for the NLNG sponsored \$100,000 USD Nigeria Prize for Science is *Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy*.

This theme is not only timely, but critical for the wellbeing of our nation. The formal call for entries has been made. If you have innovative ideas pertaining to this theme, please send in your submissions, and share the information with those who should know.

NLNG remains committed to being a globally competitive NLNG Company helping to build a better Nigeria. Our commissioning today, of an Intensive Care Unit at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Bayelsa State; through the NLNG Hospital Support Programme, is a further indication of that fact.

The Hospital Support Programme was conceived after the Covid-19 pandemic, when NLNG donated medical equipment to medical institutions across Nigeria. It is a national healthcare intervention CSR programme targeted at boosting the healthcare delivery system in twelve university teaching hospitals across all six geopolitical zones in the country. Each identified facility is catered for based on the results of the needs analyses which were carried out in conjunction with the respective hospitals to determine an intervention area. Though the twelve beneficiary hospitals

were selected based on the need to ensure spread across the six geopolitical zones – minimum of one hospital from each zone, there is a special status for the South-South zone as this is where NLNG is located – one hospital per state, was endorsed.

Bayelsa State in the South-South zone is therefore benefiting from the Hospital Support Programme, through NLNG's partnership with the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital. The approved cost was maximum US\$500,000 per hospital and a total cost of US\$6 Million for the entire Hospital Support Program. This HSP was further split into two phases for ease of implementation, spanning delivery between 2022 and 2024. The Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital which is of the Phase 1 roll-out, has health intervention in the construction and equipping of an Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

The ICU Building is a one-storey building (ground & first floor). The building, among other associated facilities, includes a six bedded Intensive Care Unit (ICU), four bedded Renal Dialysis Unit and connected to the existing operating theatre. Other facilities in the building includes a water treatment room, burn ICU, sluice room, general and nursing changing room, consulting (doctor's call) rooms and nursing rooms. In addition, the facility has patient drop-off covered foyer, a waiting room, record room, storage room, reception, seminar hall and toilet facilities.

We count on the expertise of the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, to put this facility to its best use, and to ameliorate the sufferings of indigenes and other Nigerian citizens, who hith-

erto, could not access relative medical intensive care, within the State and its environs.

Thanks to the management of NDUTH, and indeed, the project steering committee, for bringing this project into fruition. The health of one person, is truly, a blessing for all. I also want to specially commend the medical staff of the NDUTH for their selfless duty and care in their service to those in need of health care.

NDUTH, you are truly our partner, in the attainable goal of helping to build a better Nigeria. May this project be a legacy to benefit many people today, and many more, in the years to come. Thank you.

Mr Andy Odeh  
General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development



NLNG remains committed to being a globally competitive NLNG Company helping to build a better Nigeria. Our commissioning today, of an Intensive Care Unit at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Bayelsa State; through the NLNG Hospital Support Programme, is a further indication of that fact.





At the commissioning ceremony of the Neurosurgical & Stroke Centre at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital.

## COMMISSIONING OF THE CONSTRUCTED AND EQUIPPED NEUROSURGICAL & STROKE CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR TEACHING HOSPITAL (UCTH)

Address by Mr Andy Odeh (GM External Relations and Sustainable Dev, NLNG)

From the depth and text of history Calabar has always come across as a charming, clean and relaxing destination. Its people have rightly been identified alongside the high values of cleanliness, culinary excellence and healthy living. These values, no doubt, reflect on the healthy and happy faces on its streets, and the lush green environment that abounds. By partnering to improve health delivery here through the Hospital Support Programme, Nigeria LNG and the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital are together strengthening the cultural habits of the citizens of Calabar and Cross River State.

On the 24th of January 2022 Nigeria LNG signed the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) for Phase-1 of the Hospital Support Programme (HSP) with 6 University Teaching Hospitals in the country to deliver quality healthcare. These are the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH), the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH). The Phase-2 MoU were equally signed on the 20th of February 2023. The Phase-2 covers University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), the University of

Uyo Teaching Hospital (UUTH), and the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

On Monday 3rd of April, 2023 we commissioned the project at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The project like the one here in Calabar, is a one-storey building with a six-bed Intensive Care Unit, a four-bedded Renal Dialysis Unit connected to the existing operating theatre, a water treatment room, sluice room, doctor's call-cum-consulting rooms, nursing rooms, patients' drop-off covered foyer, waiting room, seminar hall, record room, store, reception, and toilet facilities.



Today, we are here to commission the Neurosurgical and Stroke Centre of UCTH.

Facilities here include an 18-bed neurosurgical and stroke centre, which includes nine-bed male and nine-bed female wards, an operating theatre, three consulting offices, a pharmacy, two sleep-in rooms, nursing and recovery rooms and other associated facilities.

It is remarkable that today marks the end of NLNG's National trek of Commissioning of Six of these projects in Teaching Hospitals across the country.

NLNG's commitment to building a better health for communities in Nigeria through the Hospital Support Programme is anchored on its belief in the fact that a healthy population is a reliable, strong and fortified block for building a better and sustainable society. A healthy brain projects a rational mind, innovates, creates and envisions social, economic and political growth. In the same vein a body that is alive with wellness drives the

productive vehicle of any ambitious society.

This world-class facility being commissioned today will, we believe, add to the well-being of Calabar and improve the city's profile as a tourist destination. By adding this chink to its shining armour, — who knows — this great institution could become a health destination of note. While I say this with an unfair tone of probability, I can confidently say that these health facilities would lift the level of research and learning and touch the whole gamut of medical scholarship both in this hospital and the country at large.

Nigeria LNG will continue to invest in the growth and development of Nigeria and on Nigerians. Our interventions in infrastructural development in our host communities are peerless. Our bias towards healthcare and its improvement clearly stands out. From the Health Insurance Scheme we instituted in Bonny, through our refurbishment of hospital facilities in countless communities to the hun-

dreds of dollars spent on COVID-19 relief programmes in many states during the trying times of the pandemic.

We can achieve more through the cooperation and collaboration of institutions like University Teaching hospitals and their scholars whose constant and tireless research define and refine our efforts. They guide the compass of our interventions in healthcare.

Now we know we can, let's together work towards the enthronement of better life to all through better healthcare delivery to the those who can easily afford it and to those whom time and circumstance prevent so to do.

Today is a new day for Calabar a day of hope and happiness. For us in NLNG, we say may this long continue.

Mr Andy Odeh  
General Manager, External Relations  
and Sustainable Development



Neurosurgical & Stroke Centre, University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH)



The Intensive Care Unit of the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH)



Intensive Care Unit at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital



# It is Time to Touch



## THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE

The Nigeria Prize for Science aims at celebrating excellence in scientific innovations by Nigerians and scientists from anywhere in the world, who help find solutions that would benefit Nigeria. It is acclaimed to be the biggest Science Prize in Africa.

This annual prize seeks scientific thought and approaches for the development and advancement of Nigeria. It is expected that the quest for a prestigious prize in science will improve the nation's science and technology interests, and in so doing, resolve issues that negate development of the country and its citizens' standard of living. An

advisory board administers the prize on behalf of Nigeria LNG Limited, supported by the secretariat which is located within NLNG. They are responsible for the overall governance and administration of the prize which includes, the appointment, supervision of judges, the adjudication process, approval of the outcome of the adjudication process, as well as its public announcement.

Areas where scientific interventions are sought, are defined and advertised by the advisory board for the science prize. In recent years, some areas in which scientific intervention have been sought

include addressing malaria, energy for stable power supply, climate change: erosion, drought and desertification, and Innovations for Sustainable Food Security, and for 2023, *Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy*.

When an entry has been found worthy of winning the prize, the winner is announced at a world press conference in September of the subsisting year, and thereafter, publicly awarded with the monetary prize at a grand award ceremony. The Grand Award Night usually occurs in October, commemorating the 9th October 1999 export of NLNG's first LNG cargo.



# THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

Chairman Advisory Board

**Professor Bart O. Nnaji**, FAS, FAEng, OON, CON, NNOM



**F**ounder and Chairman, Geometric Power Limited (the pioneer private power company in Nigeria). Founding Director United States National Science Foundation Center for e-Design. Former William Kepler Whiteford Professor of Engineering, and former Alcoa Foundation Professor of Engineering University of Pittsburgh, USA, (1996-2007). Former Professor of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, University of Massachusetts USA (1983 – 1996). Served as the Special Adviser to the President of Nigeria on Power (2010 -2011). Served as pioneer Chairman, Presidential Task Force on Power from June 2010- July 2011. Served as Federal Minister of Power (2011 -2012). Served as the Federal Minister of Science and Technology in 1993. In 2009, he was appointed as member of the National Energy Council. Founding President, Independent Power Producers Association of Nigeria (IPPAN). Developed the Roadmap for Power Reform in Nigeria. He subsequently led the implementation of the Roadmap as well as privatization of the Government monopoly, PHCN while serving as Minister of Power from July 2011 until his resignation in August 2012. Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Governing Board, Bells University of Technology (2018 – date). Chairman of Advisory Board of Nigeria Prize for Science sponsored by Nigeria LNG (2021- present).

He received the Distinguished Scientist Award by the World Bank – IMF Africa Group (Oct. 1998). He received the Baker Distinguished Research Award (the highest research award given by the International Institute of Industrial Engineers) (May 2001). Holds a PhD in Engineering from Virginia Tech and a Certificate of Post-Doctoral Studies in Artificial Intelligence & Robotics from MIT, USA. Fellow, Nigerian Academy of Science and Fellow, Nigerian Academy of Engineering. He is a 3-time recipient of national honors: Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON), Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON), and Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM). He holds Honorary Doctorates in Engineering, Science and Technology from 6 Universities.

He served as a member of the Governing Board of the Nigerian Merit Board (2008 – 2014). He received the U.S. Secretary of State's Distinguished Public Service Award (1995),

He received the West African Power Industries Life-time Achievement Award for 2014. He holds the traditional title of Onwa Nkanu covering a Senatorial District in Enugu State.

Member, Advisory Board

**PROF. B.Y. ABUBAKAR**

**P**rof. Baba Yusuf Abubakar's working career commenced in 1978 with the National Animal Production Research Institute (NAPRI), Shika, Zaria as a Graduate Assistant and was promoted Professor of Animal Science in 1995. He was Director in the Federal Civil Service in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (2003-2006) and served as the pioneer Executive Secretary of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (2006-2016). Prof. Abubakar was appointed as the pioneer Pro-Chancellor & Chairman of Governing Council, Gombe State University of Science & Technology, 2018-2020. Currently he is a visiting Professor and Chairman of the University Research Council, University of Abuja, as well as Chair, Board of Trustees of the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM) aka WorldFish. He is also the President of the Nigerian Institute of Animal Science in addition to being the Coordinator, Agriculture Thematic Group, TETFund Research & Development Standing Committee.

Internationally, Prof. Abubakar has served in various capacities as follows: Member, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research [CGIAR] Governing Council representing sub-Saharan Africa, 2008-

–2016; Chairman, Governing Board of the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF /WECARD), 2010-2012; Liaison officer, Centre for Agricultural Biosciences International (CABI), 2008-2016; Member, Governing Board of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), 2010- 2012; Member, Expert Panel on the development of Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa, 2013; and Member, Executive Board, Technical Center for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA), 2013-2018.

Prof. Abubakar holds an MSc [1983] and PhD [1985] in Animal Breeding and Quantitative Genetics from the prestigious Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, U.S.A. and has published extensively in reputable national and international journals. He received the Presidential National Honours Award of Officer of the Order of the Federal Republic (OFR) in 2011 and the CORAF/WECARD Award of Honour for invaluable contribution to Agricultural Research and Development in West and Central Africa in 2012.

Member, Advisory Board

## Chief Dr Mrs Onikepo Nike Akande, CON, OON, FIOD, JP



**C**hief Dr Mrs Onikepo Nike Akande was the First Woman and a Two-Time Minister of Industry of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. She is a Harvard Trained Professional and an Investment Expert.

She is an accountant and a renowned Industrialist. A Former President described her as “A role model and an inspiration”. She has participated in a number of International Trade and Investments both Overseas and in Nigeria. She is also a recipient of many Honours and Awards both in Nigeria and Overseas.

Chief Dr Mrs Onikepo Akande has had a distinguished career in Nigeria’s business landscape and her CV can best be described as intimidating. Some of her achievements are highlighted below: The First Female President of Harvard Business School Association of Nigeria. 2010 to 2012.

Group Chairman, Emerging Africa Capital Limited. Sept. 2018 to Date.

Chairman of NEPAD Business Group Nigeria (New Partnership for Africa’s Development).

Past President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Dec 2015 -Dec 2017; She is an honorary Life Vice President of the Nigerian Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA); Director of PZ Cussons Foundation, 2008 to date; Member of the Advisory Board of NLNG Nigeria Prize for Science, 2016 -date; Director of Union Bank of Nigeria PLC, 2008 - date; Distinguished Honorable Delegate to the National Conference of Nigeria; 2014. 2014. Member of the panel to study and

re-organise Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

Director of Nigeria Industrial Development Bank (NIDB) now Bank of Industry. 1990-1994.

International Consultant to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNIFEM and UNIDO.

Member of Vision 2010 and Vision 2020 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Pro Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council of Aletheia University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. August 2023.

Member of Governing Council, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State. June 2021 to Date.

Member of the Board of Trustees of West Midlands Open University (WMOU). Trustee of President Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPL). 2016 to Date. Member of the Board of Trustee of the National Centre for Women Development, Abuja. 1992-1994

### Awards:

Life Time Leadership Award by Euroknowledge at the House of Lords, London, UK. 2019.

She is the recipient of the Lagos State Government 2011 Tax Compliance Award.

Unilever Nigeria Plc. Scholar. 1959 at Queens’ School, Ede.

She is happily married to Chief Adebayo Akande, MFR, a solicitor, promoter and chairman, Splash FM 105.5 and Lagelu FM 96.7.



Chairman, Panel of Judges NPS

**PROF. JOSEPH EBERENDU AHANEKU**

PhD (Ib), CBiol, M.Biol (Lond), MIPAN (Nig), FSTA (Jp), FISPON, FPSN, FFIAN, FSeh, FAS, FAMedS.



Professor Joseph Ahaneku obtained his PhD in Chemical Pathology from the University of Ibadan at the age of 28, he was subsequently employed at the then Anambra State University of Technology in the old Anambra State (now Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka) as the Foundation, first and only Lecturer 1 academic Staff of the Department of Chemical Pathology, College of Health Sciences, Nnewi Campus. In 1992, he was appointed Honorary Consultant Chemical Pathologist at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, Anambra State. In 1994, the then Dr Ahaneku, won the Science and Technology Agency (STA) of Japan fellowship and grant to work at National Institute of Health, Tokyo, being the first Nigerian and the only African that year, to secure the highly competitive STA fellowship and grant. At the end of the 18 months stay in Tokyo, Dr Ahaneku emerged as the STA foreign Researcher of the year under the Research Development Cooperation (RDC) of Japan, making Ahaneku, the first African and first black Scientist to receive that STA and RDC of Japan honour. The then Dr Ahaneku, rose through the ranks to become a Professor of Chemical Pathology on his 35th birthday being 1st October, 1997.

Prof Ahaneku, has worked as a Consultant to UNESCO projects. He has held several administrative positions from faculty to University management levels. He was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in 2010 –

2012 and 2012 – 2014 (two terms). He was also the Director Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, from 2010 to 2014 and later became the Chairman of the Board of Confucius Institute Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Xiamen University, China partnership under Hanban, China for five years. Prof Ahaneku served as the 5th substantive Vice-Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State (2014 to 2019). He was elected the Chairman, Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (CVC) from Sept 2017 to June 2019; and the Chairman, Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU) from October 2018 to June 2019.

Professor Ahaneku is a member of the executive Council of the Nigerian Academy of Science, Chairman, Basic Clinical Science section of the Academy of Medicine Specialties of Nigeria and Vice-President of the Academy of Medicine Specialties of Nigeria. Prof Ahaneku was a Member of the last Board of Directors, Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN). He is the current National President, Association of Clinical Chemists of Nigeria and a visiting Scholar with the National Universities Commission, Abuja, Nigeria.

Prof Ahaneku is happily married to Professor Gladys Ifesinachi Ahaneku (mni) and they are blessed with four boys and a daughter.

## PROF. ABDULLAHI A. ABBA



Abdullahi A Abba is currently a Professor of Medicine and Pulmonology, Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria and Chief Consultant Physician, Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Shika, Zaria. He was one of three doctors who started the Department of Medicine at University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital in 1981 before proceeding to the United Kingdom and Ireland to train in General Internal Medicine and Pulmonology. He obtained post-graduate Diploma in Chest Diseases and Tuberculosis from the University of Wales (now Cardiff University) in 1983 and, after training in various disciplines of Internal Medicine, passed the first and second parts of the examination for the award of Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in the first sitting in February 1988. He took up appointment with King Khalid University Hospital Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as a Senior Registrar and later Consultant Physician and Pulmonologist. He was the first physician to establish fiberoptic bronchoscopy service at the then Ri-

yadh Central Hospital, now King Saud Medical Complex. He was appointed Assistant Professor and later Associate Professor at King Saud University, Riyadh.

In these capacities, he headed the largest Clinical Teaching Unit in the Middle East at King Saud Medical City, Riyadh for over a decade. He took special interest in training both undergraduate and post-graduate medical students and in developing research, clinical and diagnostic skills among young doctors. He served as an examiner for the Arab and Saudi Examination boards as well the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, for which body, he also examined in other countries in the Middle East and Asia. He serves on the Credentials Committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. He also served as a supervisor for other bodies notably College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan.

He is currently the Provost College of Medicine, Kaduna State University where he is credited with graduating the first set of medical doctors from the University after over a decade of stagnation. At the national level, he has served as the Chairman of the Presidential Visitation Panel to Federal University of Lafia, Lafia and is currently the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo. He is a Patron of the Stop TB partnership, an NGO focused on the elimination of Tuberculosis.

He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, Fellow of American College of Chest Physicians, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

and Fellow of Academy of Medical Specialties. He is a member of, and actively participates in, many professional societies including the Nigerian Thoracic Society, Pan-African Thoracic Society, American Thoracic Society, European Respiratory Society, Saudi Thoracic Society and Gulf Thoracic Society.

He serves as a managing director and chief executive of United Doctors – a consortium of doctors whose focus is improving the research and clinical skills of doctors in practice in Nigeria as well as providing health talks and outreach programmes for the general public. United Doctors is duly accredited by the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria. In this capacity he organized numerous workshops, seminars and hands-on-training for doctors in the country awarding certificates and credit hours to participants. He also serves as a Consultant for Sir Ahmadu Bello Memorial Foundation, NNPC Medical Services and other bodies.

Member, Panel of Judges NPS

**PROF OLAITAN ALICE SOYANNWO,** MBBS, DA, M.Med, FWACS, FICS, FAS, FNAMed



**O**laitan Soyannwo was born at Ilisan, Ogun State, attended Mayflower School, Ikenne, Queen's College, Yaba, Lagos and later the University of Ibadan Medical School, qualifying in 1971. She trained in anaesthesia at the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan with overseas rotations as one of the pioneers of the M.Med degree of the University of Ibadan, which predated the National Postgraduate Fellowship. She obtained Diploma in Anaesthesia in 1974, M. Med (Anaes.) from the University of Ibadan in 1980 and the Fellowship of the West African College of Surgeons (WACS) by election in 1984. In 1981, she was appointed lecturer at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan and honorary Consultant in Anaesthesia and Intensive care at the University College Hospital, Ibadan. She rose through the ranks in her professional career and was promoted to professor in 1998. She was elected a Fellow of the International College of Surgeons in 1997.

Her contributions and leadership roles at national levels include acting head, department of Anaesthesia, College

of Medicine, University of Ibadan at various times from 1988 to 1996 and head of department from 1998 to 2002. She was Dean of Clinical Sciences, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan from 2002 to 2004. She also served as visiting professor of anaesthesia at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and honorary consultant from 2006 to 2007 and resource consultant to the hospital from 2010 to 2014. She made great strides in her focus area of effective pain management and led her volunteer team to inaugurate the Society for the Study of Pain, Nigeria (SSPN) in 1998, a foremost chapter of the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP). The organization collaborates with other international organizations (WHO, Pain and policy Study group, Federal Ministry of Health and National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC)) on pain management issues, Opioid availability and accessibility in Nigeria. She served as a member of the National Cancer Consultative committee that drafted the first National cancer guidelines with palliative care as one of the goals in 2007. She is also a pioneer and member of the board of trustees of the Hospice and Palliative Care Association, Nigeria (HPCAN) which was inaugurated in 2007. She also led her team in Ibadan to register a Not for profit organization, Centre for Palliative Care Nigeria (CPCN) in 2005 that collaborated with the University College Hospital, Ibadan to establish the first palliative care unit at the hospital in 2007, the first of such in a tertiary institution in Nigeria.

She served as a member of the PEPFAR committee, Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the American Academy of Science and she has served on several international scientific committees

including World Health Organization (WHO) advisory committees. She was a member of the Global Pain forum on declaration of Montreal, speaker at the launching of the Global Day Against Pain, Geneva, Switzerland, a key member of the WHO Anaesthesia Safety Group of the Safe Surgery Saves Lives Campaign and Global Initiative for Emergency and Essential Surgical care (GIESSC) in 2007. Her advocacy and thrust were well acknowledged as crucial to facilitating the decision to include pulse oximetry on the WHO Safe Surgery Checklist and Global oximetry project in 2008. She was a major contributor to the revision of the 2010 International Standards for a Safe Practice of Anaesthesia and acknowledged in the WFSA-WHO 2016 version. As a member of the African Palliative Care Association (APCA) she also served meritoriously on the Board of trustees from 2004 to 2010 and as Vice chairman of the board from 2008 to 2010. She is a member of the advisory committee for APCA and has collaborated with APCA on training of palliative care professionals and establishment of palliative care at national level in several African countries especially West Africa - Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Liberia.

She is currently, the president of a Not for profit organization - Centre for Palliative Care, Nigeria and on the Advisory board of some Not for profit humanitarian organizations including APCA, Global Partners in care (GPIC) and School for the handicapped, Ijokodo, Ibadan.



# HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE

(YEAR, WINNING ENTRY, PRIZE RECIPIENT)



2022

*Gains in Grain Yield of Released Maize (Zea Mays L.) Cultivars under Drought by Muhyideen Oyekunle and Shehu Ado and Well-Watered Conditions Development of Process Plant for Plantain Flour by Sesan Peter Ayodeji and Emmanuel Olatunji Olatomilola*



2019

*Carbon Capture, Carbon Utilization, and Biomass Gasification and Energy Storage for Power Generation by Professor Meihong Wang and Dr. Mathew Aneke.*



2018

*Nanostructured Metal Hydrides for the Storage of Electrical Power from Renewable Energy Sources and for Explosion Prevention in High Voltage Power Transformers by Peter Ngene.*



2017

*Improving Home and Community Management of Malaria: Providing the Evidence Base by Ikeoluwapo Ajayi, Ayodele Jegede and Bidemi Yusuf; Multi-faceted Efforts at Malaria Control in Research: Management of Malaria of Various Grades by Olugbenga Mokuola; and Novel Lipid Micro-particles for Effective Delivery of Artemeter Antimalarial Drug Using a locally sourced Irvingia Fat from Nuts of Irvingia Gabonensis var Excelsa (Ogbono) by Chukwuma Agubata.*



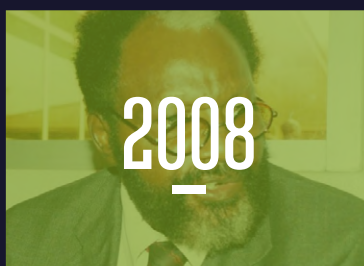
2010

*Development of a New Method in Die Design by Professor Akaehomen Ibadode.*



2009

*Discovery of the gene responsible for the creation of Sialidase (SD), an enzyme which causes sleeping sickness (Trypanosomiasis) by Professor Andrew Nok.*



2008

*Solution to Road Pavement Destabilisation by the Invention of 'Lateralite': A Stabilisation Flux for Fine Grained Lateritic Soils by Dr. Ebenezer Meshida.*



2004

*Real-Time Computer Assisted Leak Detection/Location Reporting and Inventory Loss Monitoring System by Professor Akpoveta Susu & Dr. Kingsley Abhulimen.*

The years of 2005 – 2007; 2011-2016 and 2021 had no winners and the 2020 competition did not hold, due to Covid-19.

# REPORT BY THE PANEL OF JUDGES FOR THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE 2023



Photos from The Nigeria Prize for Science 2023 press conference and handover of entries

## Preamble

The panel of judges made up of three distinguished Professors in different specialties of Medical Sciences is profusely thankful to the Advisory Board of Nigeria Prize for Science and Nigeria LNG Limited, particularly for the theme of this year's Prize: "Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy" and generally for their sustained interest towards the advancement of scientific research, innovation and technology in Nigeria and the world-over. We feel privileged and deeply honoured to be part of the team for the selection and celebration of this year's Prize for Science which the NLNG has consistently administered since 2004 till date.

## The report call for entries:

The management of NLNG through the Advisory Board of Nigeria Prize for Science (NPS) put out advertisement for 2023 NPS under the thematic area 'Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy.' The scope of the theme among other things, covered the following: cure or protocols for effective management of specific/particular health challenges; technologies/protocols for effective management of healthcare

therapy and processes for managing major outbreaks/pandemics. The entries closed at 12.00 midnight of 30th April, 2023.

## Handover of valid entries and shortlisting process:

At the close of entries, out of the 100 entries received, 28 were found to be valid entries and these were subsequently handed over to the judges for shortlisting process on the 11th of May, 2023. A standardized shortlisting template was agreed upon by the judges and the Advisory Board. The template had elements such as: evidence of originality, feasibility, acceptability, free of ethical issues, free of plagiarism, affordability / cost effectiveness / accessibility. The judges applied the template independently in assessing the entries and each judge returned his/her verdict directly to the NLNG secretariat for collation. The three judges independently affirmed that entries from (a) Temitope Oshin (b) Sotonye Fyneyface Ogan (c) Hippolite Amadi (d) Dimie Ogoina met all the guidelines for shortlisting and were subsequently presented to Advisory Board on the 19th of July as shortlisted entries.

## Full evaluation of shortlisted entries by judges and external consultant:

The shortlisted entries were now subjected to full scale evaluation using a standardized template also agreed upon by the judges and the advisory Board. The template for full evaluation had two sections viz: Screening Criteria – 25 marks and Core Criteria – 75 marks. The screening criteria had elements such as: Academic track records (quality of published works relevant to the entry); Quality of the entry and Recognition of the work (whether the work had earned previous award or recognition). The Core Criteria had elements such as: Uniqueness of the entry; impact of the entry to the society; Commercialization potential; Soundness of the work and whether the work had been Patented (with commercial track record). A total score of 100 was envisaged with a pass mark or cut-off mark of 80.

## Unanimous selection of the winning entry:

Each judge as well as the External Consultant sent the scores of the evaluated entries directly to the secretariat for collation. During the revelation of the collated scores from each of the judges

and the external consultant in the presence of the panel of judges and members of the Advisory Board on the 30th of August, it happened that each judge as well as the external consultant consistently scored the entry by Hippolite Amadi above the mark of 80 with an aggregate score of 88 marks. Conversely, the other entries respectively did not meet the threshold of 80 marks as the entry by Sotonye Fyनेface Ogan had aggregate score of 62 marks, while the entry by Dimie Ogoina aggregate score of 62 marks and the entry by Temitope Oshin aggregate score of 51 marks.

#### **Conclusion and recommendaiton:**

The Advisory Board of NPS unanimously affirmed the consensus decision of the panel of judges and the external consultant which declared the entry by Hippolite Amadi titled “Low-cost Respiratory Technologies for Keeping the Nigerian Neonates alive” as the most outstanding entry in this year’s Prize for Science. ‘The entry showcased 3 technological innovations aimed at saving the lives of neonates by making delivery of oxygen cheap and easy namely (a) the non-invasive neonatal ventilator-the key invention (The bubble PoliteCPAP) for continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) ventilation of very low-birth weight neonates, a feasible alternative to the readily available improvised bubble CPAP (IBCPAP) in cost-constrained settings. (b) oxygen delivery blender system – allowing for a safe delivery of oxygen without the danger of toxicity (c) oxygen splitter system – allowing for the use of a shared source of oxygen to many neonates at a time, in situations where piped oxygen is not available. These devices are all solar-power driven. These products have shown

a lot of promise in the advancement of Medical practice in low-income Countries such as Nigeria. The devices have been tried by practitioners at various hospitals across Nigeria. The reports from those centres have shown that the product PoliteCPAP is an improvement on the existing device as it provides access to ventilators and oxygen delivery simultaneously to neonates at extremely reduced cost of N750,000 as against N6.5 million for the existing device with comparable and better efficiency. The devices are currently in use in Tertiary hospitals in all the geo-political zones of Nigeria thereby exemplifying the commercial track records and impact of the devices. One of his products, the PoliteCPAP product caused drastic reduction in the price of the existing brand (Fisher & Paykle model) of CPAP in the market, underscoring the competitive economic optimum of the devices and their commercial potentials. Overall, the work of Hippolite Amadi has not only significantly advanced neonatal care in Nigeria and similar Countries, it has further improved access and lowered the cost of neonatal care by causing an observed reduction in the market prices of the competing/existing devices’. From the foregoing, the Advisory Board in agreement with the panel of judges recommends the entry by Hippolite Amadi for the award of 2023 Nigeria Prize for Science.

#### **Additional recommendations:**

The judges also wish to recommend the following to the Advisory Board of NPS and management of Nigeria NLG: 1. That in placing advertisement for call for Entries in respect of NPS, apart from using standard media outlets, the adverts should be placed in strong world-class Science journals such

as “Science”, “Nature”, “Lancet”. Adverts should also be sent to various Academies, Triple Helix Conversation Group and to the standing Committee on National Research Fund through TETFund office in Nigeria.

2. The Advisory Board of NPS and Management of Nigeria NLG Limited, may wish to consider appointing some previous and present judges as NPS ambassadors or advocates for a specified period, for the purpose of awareness creation across Tertiary Institutions, Research Institutes, Professional Bodies and Academies in order to acquaint researchers with the nature of entries required for Nigeria Prize for Science.

#### **Attachments:**

The secretariat is to supply the following attachments to this report:

- Call for Entries Advertisement
- Long list of Entries and the valid 28 Entries
- Collated shortlist screening by the judges
- The shortlisted four Entries as agreed by judges and Advisory Board of NPS
- Collated scores of the judges and External Consultant after full evaluation of shortlisted entries
- Spreadsheet of scores from judges and External Consultant displaying consensus Entry as adjudged by panel of judges, External Consultant and Advisory Board of NPS.

We thank the Chairman and members of the Advisory Board of NPS and the Management of Nigeria LNG Limited for the opportunity given to us to serve. We also appreciate the administrative support from the staff of NLNG.

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Prof. Joseph .E. Ahaneku, FAS, FAMedS (Chairman of Panel)  
Prof. Olaitan Soyannwo, FAS, FNAMed (Member of Panel)  
Prof. Abdullahi Abba, FRCPI,FCCP (Member of Panel)



# THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE: ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE WINNER



## The Announcement

Permit me to begin this address by applauding the Board and Management of Nigeria LNG for instituting and sustaining what is arguably the biggest science prize in Africa and generally for their sustained interest towards the advancement of scientific research, innovation and technology in Nigeria and the world-over. We hope that other corporate organisations will emulate them as they continue to demonstrate their passion for helping to build a better Nigeria and ultimately Africa.

In February 2023, the Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Science announced the call for entries for the annual

prize, centred on the theme 'Innovation for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy.' By the deadline set for submission, we had received One Hundred (100) entries.

The theme 'Innovations for Enhancement of Healthcare Therapy' is significant because our nation, Nigeria, is in dire need of not just personnel but technology to enhance healthcare delivery system in our country and save lives; and also invest huge funds pumped into medical tourism into our ailing economy. Globally, we all know that goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) centre on "good health and well-being" and part of this is providing innovative

technologically based healthcare facilities that can help improve healthcare delivery services generally.

A Panel of Judges was appointed to assess entries submitted for the Prize. The appointed judges are seasoned academics who have wide experience, peer recognition, good public image and command respect nationally and internationally. They are Prof. Joseph Ahaneku, (FAS, FAMEDS), Chairman; Prof. Olaitan Soyannwo (FAS, F-NAMed) Member, and Prof. Abdullahi Abba (FRCPI, FCCP), member.

The choice of the judges reflects a multi-disciplinary approach relevant to the theme

in focus. A total number of One Hundred (100) entries for the 2023 prize were handed over to the Advisory Board and after thorough scrutiny 28 entries were found valid and handed over to the judges for independent evaluation. Each member of the Panel was to evaluate the entries individually and submit to the Prize Secretariat. Thereafter, the Panel convened to discuss and harmonise the submissions.

The Panel of Judges submitted the assessment criteria after exhaustive deliberation and the Advisory Board reviewed and approved the criteria and this was adopted as the bases for assessment of all the qualified entries. The

approved criteria are: evidence of originality, feasibility, acceptability, free of ethical issues, free of plagiarism, affordability/cost effectiveness/ accessibility.

The template for full evaluation had two sections viz: screening criteria – 25 marks, and core criteria – 75 marks. The screening criteria had elements such as: academic track records (quality of published works relevant to the entry); quality of the entry and recognition of the work (whether the work had earned previous award or recognition).

The core criteria had elements such as: uniqueness of the entry; impact of the entry to the society; commercialization potential; soundness of the work and whether the work had been patented (with commercial track record). A total score of 100 was envisaged with a pass mark or cut-off mark of 80.

The three judges independently affirmed that entries from (a) Temitope Oshin (b) Sotonye Fyनेface Ogan (c) Hippolite Amadi (d) Dimie Ogoina met all the guidelines for shortlisting and were subsequently presented to Advisory Board on the 19th of July as shortlisted entries.

The shortlisted entries were subsequently subjected to

full scale evaluation using a standardized template also agreed by the judges and the Advisory Board. Each judge as well as the external consultant sent the scores of the evaluated entries directly to the secretariat for collation. During the revelation of the collated scores from each of the judges and the external consultant in the presence of the panel of judges and members of the Advisory Board, it happened that each judge as well as the external consultant consistently scored the entry by one of the applicants above the mark of 80 with an aggregate score of 88 marks while the rest were 62 and below.

#### **Unanimous selection of the winning entry:**

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, the Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Science unanimously affirmed the consensus decision of the panel of judges and the external consultant which declared the entry by Hippolite Amadi titled “Low-cost Respiratory Technologies for Keeping the Nigerian Neonates Alive” as the most outstanding entry in this year’s The Nigeria Prize for Science.

The entry showcased 3 technological innovations aimed at saving the lives of neonates by making delivery of oxygen cheap and easy namely:

(a) The non-invasive neo-

natal ventilator-the key invention (The bubble PoliteCPAP) for continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) ventilation of very low-birth weight neonates, a feasible alternative to the readily available improvised bubble CPAP (IBCPAP) in cost-constrained settings.

(b) Oxygen delivery blender system – allowing for a safe delivery of oxygen without the danger of toxicity.

(c) Oxygen splitter system – allowing for the use of a shared source of oxygen to many neonates at a time, in situations where piped oxygen is not available. These devices are all solar-power driven.

These products have shown a lot of promise in the advancement of medical practice in low-income countries such as Nigeria. The devices have been tried by practitioners at various hospitals across Nigeria. The reports from those centres have shown that the product PoliteCPAP is an improvement on the existing device as it provides access to ventilators and oxygen delivery simultaneously to neonates at extremely reduced cost of N750,000 as against N6.5 million for the existing device with comparable and better efficiency.

The devices are currently in use in tertiary hospitals in all the geo-political zones of Nigeria thereby exemplifying

the commercial track records and impact of the devices. One of his products, the PoliteCPAP product caused drastic reduction in the price of the existing brand (Fisher & Paykle model) of CPAP in the market, underscoring the competitive economic optimum of the devices and their commercial potentials.

Overall, the work of Hippolite Amadi has not only significantly advanced neonatal care in Nigeria and similar countries, it has further improved access and lowered the cost of neonatal care by causing an observed reduction in the market prices of the competing/existing devices. He is hereby declared the winner of The Nigeria Prize for Science, 2023.

Finally, we particularly thank Nigeria LNG for their consistency and continued sponsorship of the prize in the face of our challenging economic and social landscape. Our appreciation also goes to you, ladies and gentlemen of the press, for publicising the Prize.

Thank you.

Prof Bart Nnaji  
Chairman, Advisory Board  
- The Nigeria Prize for Science



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## Transforming lives with cleaner, safer and affordable energy

Reduction in Gas flaring  
from 65% to <20%

100% Nigerian Management  
95% Nigerian Staff



## Contribution to Nigeria revenue profile

Diversifying revenue portfolio, Taxes,  
feed-gas purchase, dividend to FGN

## Unparalleled social performance

Economic empowerment, education,  
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# WINNER OF THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE REDEFINING NEONATAL RESPIRATORY SUPPORT

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A set of three innovations of low-cost respiratory technologies for keeping the Nigerian Neonate alive – By Professor Hippolite Amadi

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The system's low-cost and extremely cheap operational consumables (only NGN230/ treatment as compared to NGN26,000 for F-&-P model) have paved the way for wise neonatal centres to acquire several units in their fleet to avail the teeming population of their needy neonates the opportunity of surviving RDS.

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## 1. Introduction

The burden of high neonatal mortality in Nigeria remains the most challenging trouble of the Nigerian healthcare system till date. This is a healthcare issue of concern at the commencement of the United Nations' Millennium Development goals target of 67% mortality reduction before the year 2015, of which Nigeria was a signatory. Sadly, this pursuit was a colossal failure for Nigeria as the country made 'no significant progress' towards this by the end of 2015 [1, 2]. It is more saddening to note that another interpretation to this failure may be that we, the Nige-

rian scientists, and medical academia have been incapable of producing, up-scaling and culturizing locally driven solutions to eliminate our high neonatal mortality rate (NMR) in the country to give the much-desired life to our neonate. It is also an indictment that we, the scientists and doctors, and the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) of Nigeria have been incapable of the necessary tweaking of the vast numbers of foreign adoptable ideas to make these equally efficient within our cultural and climatic setting. Scientists are supposed to discover solutions, empirically trial, and translate these for clinical use. However, it is for the policy makers

to identify these, scale them up to reach all needy patients and put the problem behind us. Unfortunately, we face the shame to have become the country with the highest neonatal mortality in the world, even ahead of India who is five times more populated than Nigeria, as we record average 846 neonatal deaths every day [3]. Nevertheless, the solutions Nigeria has frantically hoped for and sought after by spending huge costs, inviting foreign partners, and traversing across many nations of the world in search of – whatever little the idea to adopt, may have long been locally created in another form, but have been looked down upon or neglected by the Nigerian policy makers.

Many co-morbidities contribute to high neonatal mortality in Nigeria. However, one of the greatest amongst the lot is the condition which presents when the neonate is unable to breathe. This is generally known as neonatal Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS). A neonatal death from RDS is a preventable one if a special care baby unit (SCBU), as typical found in most standard tertiary hospital practices in Nigeria, is equipped with the necessary intervention materials and technologies in adequate supply. A neonate who is suffering from RDS is essentially incapable of driving the autonomous mechanisms to ventilate its lungs (breathing). This condition leads to inadequacy of oxygen for the blood gaseous exchange that happens in the lungs. The lack of oxygenat-

ed blood reaching the tissues would eventually drive the complications of tissue and organ shutdown, leading to neonatal death. This is a well-researched and known ultimate faith of the Nigerian neonate in the face of (1) lack of oxygen supply in the facility and (2) lack of the machine to drive the breathing process for the needy neonate in any of our tertiary hospitals in Nigeria. Apart from these two factors and the ‘necessary clinical knowledge of application’, any other measures being used is either grossly insufficient to save the life or completely incapable of doing so especially in situations of extreme prematurity or extreme low birthweight. Nigeria’s high neonatal mortality rate has remained the drumbeat of national and international neonatal discourse for over 32 years since the era of Millennium development Goal target no.4 (MDG4). Nigeria, for far too long, has depended on technologies spoon-fed by foreign donor agencies, many of which are grossly incompatible with our climate, demographics, and culture for the needed high efficiency. This is further compounded by poor maintenance and lack of sustainability. Our tertiary hospitals have never been sufficiently equipped with these, neither has our neonatal mortality been lowered as expected for over thirty-two years. The RDS still killed the Nigerian neonate in their numbers whilst our practitioners suffered with ineffective ‘improvised’ makeshift materials – delivering substandard therapy they knew

could not adequately save the neonate. “We managed with what we had” – such response was popular when another neonate died. A neonatal ventilator (an invasive machine used to help drive the breathing mechanism for a distressed neonate) is too expensive – more than NGN15 million for some models as of 2017, hence unaffordable by the referral centres at our premier hospitals. Oxygen may not always be available to be delivered to the neonate – even in the crudest form with the associated complications which may still lead to the onset of other conditions that could claim the life of the child soon after. The fact is that there is no room to cut corners in the life-threatening neonatal RDS – it is either the real technology, materials, and knowledge are available, or otherwise the result would be the neonate’s poor health outcome or death. Therefore, the Nigerian neonate still faced death due to high-cost factor for technology, lack of ingenious ways of efficient oxygen deployment, knowledge gaps and mediocrity. It would take a passionate stakeholder who is emotionally attached to Nigeria as a nation and her people to push the boundaries of this sad situation to develop affordable technologies, but not necessarily driven by financial profit making. Since global medical technology creation is dominated by the quest to generate profit, it may only take a Nigerian whose primary interest is lifesaving to selflessly develop such machines, without hoping to be financially rewarded. There-

fore, without endless waiting for the ‘Whiteman’ mentality, a Nigerian scientist with the compassion and capability must intervene to push this boundary of neonatal survival for our teeming population of needy newborns.

In this submission, I present one aspect of my highly successful continuous nationwide solution creation to rid Nigeria of the crippling problem of high neonatal mortality rate based on local practice-driven deficiencies – a wider drive that has been ongoing for 25 years. This involves three items of individually researched, developed, trialled, peer-reviewed and clinically implemented frugal medical devices, which are already in use at many Nigerian facilities, impacting hundreds of Nigerian neonates across the nation. This is the ‘Neonatal Concerns’ [4] activities of Professor Hippolite Amadi of Imperial College London [5].

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of the project were to collaborate with local practitioners to identify clinical militating factors boosting the Nigerian high neonatal mortality, and finding locally plausible scientific ideas which could be effective and sustainable within the local practice and supporting its transferability to other tertiary hospitals around the country, and wider dissemination of findings through peer-reviewed medical conferences and journal publications.

### 3. Concepts and Designs

#### 3.1. Identification of morbidity and need.

My typical pattern was to make friendship with the local management officers of Nigerian tertiary hospitals, Paediatrics Departments and Neonatal Units of hospitals, steering conversations towards the Nigerian neonatal mortality burden. I was always on the lookout for articles through broadcasts and the print media, or through Nigerian conferences where issues of specific neonatal disaster are reported, implicating a need. I would approach the leadership of the Paediatrics department of the concerned hospitals, offering to collaborate to find a solution to the reported problem. The overwhelming burden of the embarrassing issue often makes the leadership to quickly ac-

cept to allow me a trial, especially when my methods are envisaged to cost them little or close to nothing. The specific factor of neonatal burden is then fully identified.

It was at the 2017 conference of the Nigerian Society of Neonatal Medicine (NISONM) in Ibadan that the high national burden of the risks of juvenile blindness was laid bare without a solution in sight. The open scientific discourse identified the cause as 'retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)'. The ROP is a chain of complication events following neonatal oxygenoverdose, perhaps associated with the treatment of neonatal respiratory distress syndrome (RDS) shortly after birth. I attended this conference in July 2017 [6]. It would be difficult to protect the neonate from ROP because oxygen therapy is an essential part of the treatment

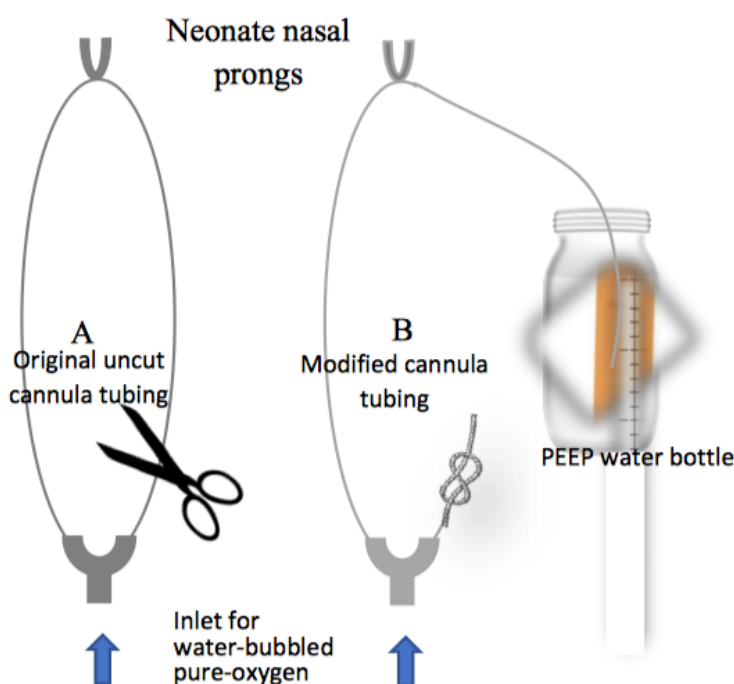
of RDS without which the neonate dies. However, the same oxygen that could save the neonate at birth sets it up for another life-threatening challenge via ROP thereafter.

#### 3.2. Catastrophic Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)

The ROP could be avoided if the Nigerian practitioner could, instead of delivering pure oxygen to the neonate, finds an efficient way to deliver 'appropriately quantified' mixture of pureoxygen and atmospheric air, in a predetermined fraction of pure-oxygen (known as  $FiO_2$ ) in the delivered gas to the neonate. The cheapest method of achieving this inspiratory air-oxygen mixture is through the application of non-invasive ventilation machines, such as bubble continuous positive airway pressure (bCPAP) machines. This was too ex-

pensive and not affordable by most Nigerian facilities. The Nigerian paediatrician could only report the technology deficiencies to their Hospital Management without any further solution in sight. Rather than do nothing and watch the neonate die, the practitioner resorts to a makeshift technique. This technique takes flowing pure-oxygen from oxygen cylinder or oxygen concentrator, bubbles this through a humidifier (water in a bottle) and delivers to the neonate via a RAM cannula or endotracheal-tube, (figure 1A). In another technique referred to as 'improvised bubble CPAP', the practitioner, in addition, modifies the nasal cannula and uses a bottle full of water to generate a 'positive end expiratory pressure (PEEP)' (figure 1B).

Figure 1: silicon tubing for pure-oxygen delivery





### 3.3. Catastrophic Iatrogenic Hypothermia

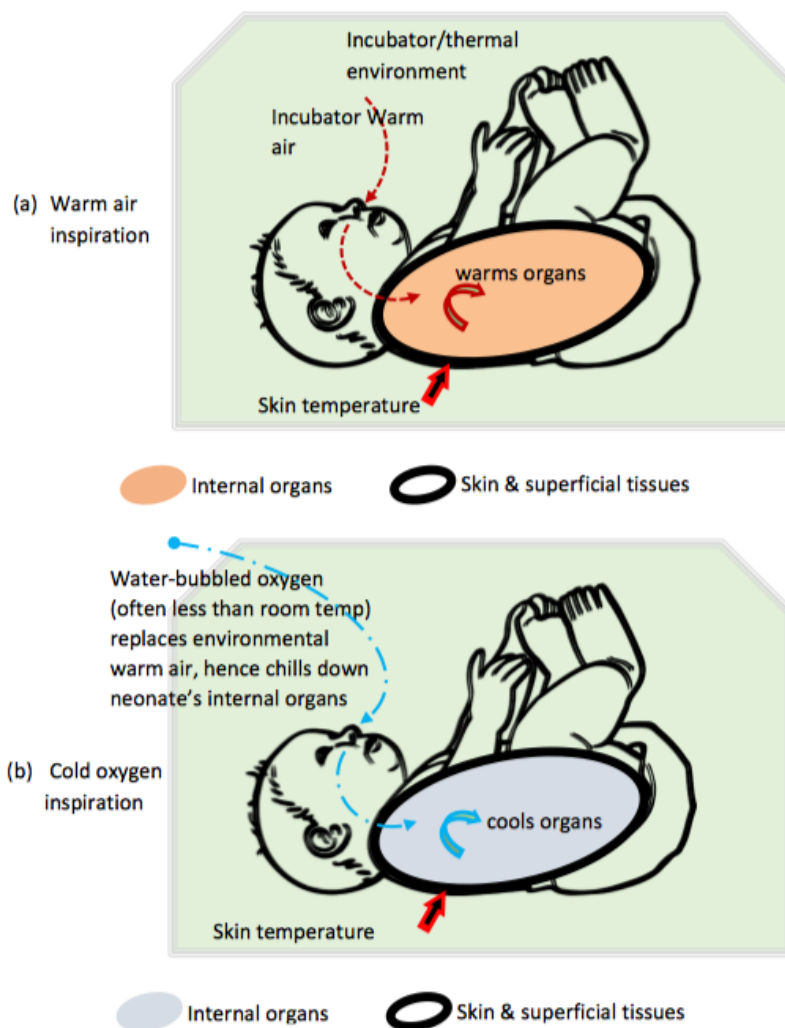
In both techniques of direct oxygen delivery, a clinically dangerous event is unwittingly taking place for the very weak neonate. The

bubbled pure oxygen is often colder than room temperature. Hence, without the intention to chill the neonate's internal organs, the doctor delivers this extremely cold oxygen directly to the lungs. This will normally trigger a

condition known as 'iatrogenic hypothermia' in which the lung passes its coldness to the circulating blood and hence causes internal hypothermia that is rarely measured or evaluated superficially. Extremely premature

or low birthweight neonates have thus died as internal organs shutdown due to severe iatrogenic hypothermia (figure 2) [7].

Figure 2: Iatrogenic hypothermia (a) Inflow of warm air, replaced by (b) inflow of cold oxygen



Iatrogenic hypothermia and the ROP, hence, present the unavoidable risks of the popular techniques of oxygen therapy for the Nigerian

neonate, for which there is no cutting of corners. Hence, the only solution is to develop an artificial intelligent system to help the neonate

to breathe-in warm-humidified,  $F_{iO_2}$ -appropriate, and lungs-warming blended air-oxygen mixture. Therefore, beginning from 2017, I

set out to design and develop (1) the PoliteheartCPAP machine, (2) the PoliteO2 blend and (3) the PoliteO 2 Splitter System, PSS. 4. Results

#### 4.1. Non-invasive neonatal ventilation – the Politehe-artCPAP (2017)

Prior to this project I had spent many years working on neonatal thermal control for the Nigerian neonate. Therefore, from 1996, at UCTH Calabar, my arduous work of finding solutions to fix Nigeria's nightmare of high neonatal deaths owing to poor technologies and thermoneutral knowledge-gaps spread widely across all regions of Nigeria, saving millions of neonates. I resisted all distractions and calls to also investigate other contributing co-factors of neonatal mortality in Nigeria. I rather concentrated on the theme of 'thermal factor' to provide frugal solutions to address all emerging and discovered adverse phenomena and knowledge gaps affecting effective neonatal incubation therapy. However, this was not the only factor bedeviling and sending the Nigerian neonate to the graves. By the 20<sup>th</sup> year of my Nigeria neonatal outreach in 2016, it was clearly obvious to me that I had provided and disseminated all necessary knowledge and technological solutions required to completely prevent Nigeria's thermoneutral-induced neonatal deaths – provided these technologies, knowledge and procedures were adhered to and scaled-up.

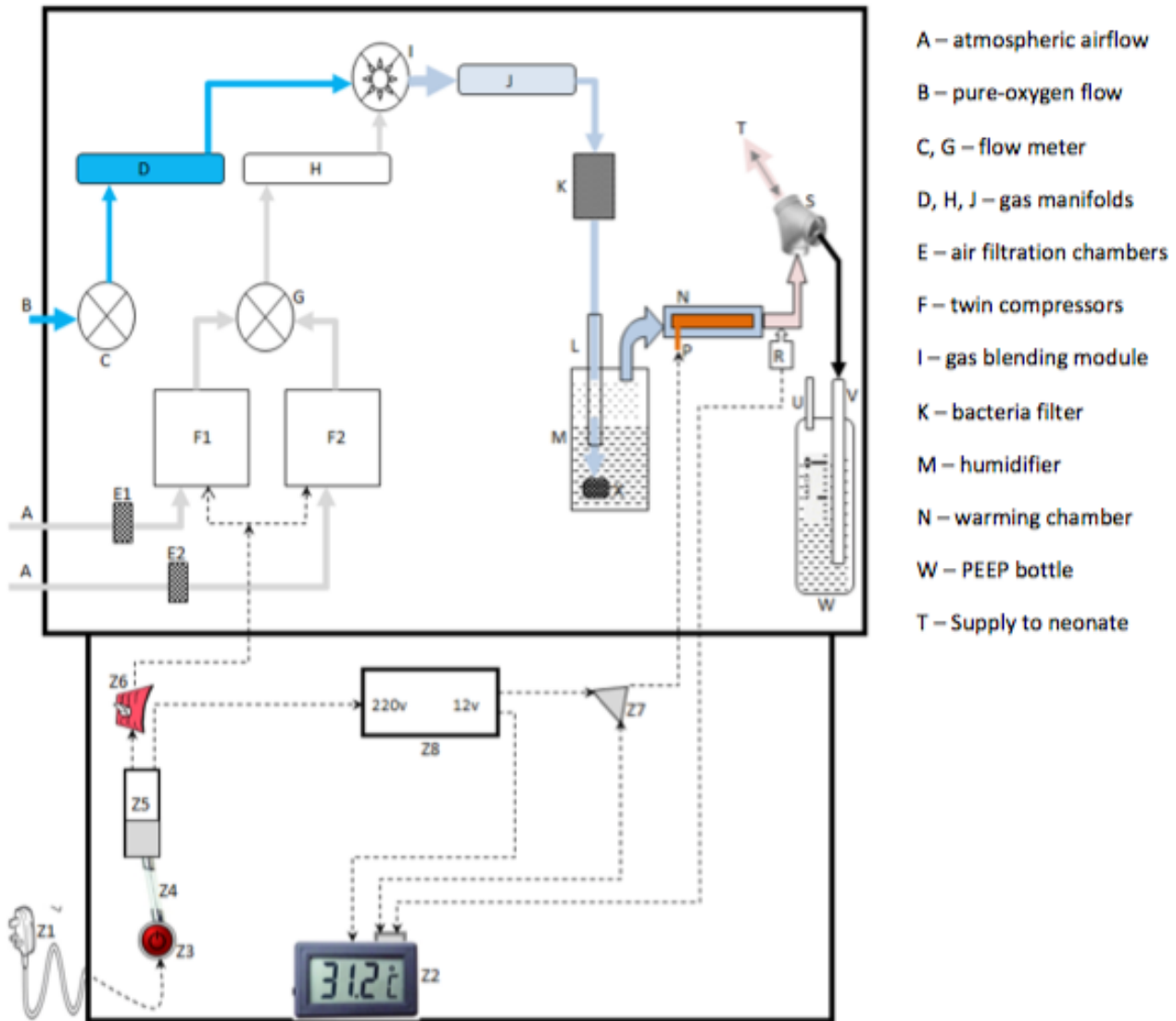
Amongst the other neonatal co-morbidities contributing

to high neonatal mortality in Nigeria was 'respiratory distress syndrome (RDS)'. Many neonates diagnosed with RDS, at best, received humidified supplemental oxygen by mask, intranasal tube, or nasal prongs directly from pure oxygen cylinders or oxygen-concentrators. This practice is the least of any respiratory support to offer a neonate dying from RDS but who is still left with some efforts to drive its auto-respiration – this is often insufficient to save the neonate. The delivery of pure (nearly 100%) oxygen to a neonate is also unsafe as has been indicated earlier, but only given as a life trade-off with the possibility of the child developing 'retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)' later in life. The safest and effective technique of supporting a neonate suffering from the breathing difficulties of RDS is to use a non-invasive mechanical ventilator to assist the neonate in breathing. A non-invasive ventilator helps the neonate by mechanically delivering appropriately humidified and blended air-oxygen mixture of the correct fraction-of-inspired oxygen (FiO<sub>2</sub>) to the neonate via a nasal cannula and ensuring that the neonate maintains a continuous-positive-airway-pressure (CPAP) through a water pressure column. Up until 2017 in Nigeria, CPAP machines were scarce and a treatment luxury, costing as much as six and half million naira

( $\square$ 6.5 million) to acquire the device, such as the Fisher & Paykle brand of the technology (Fisher-&Paykle Healthcare, New Zealand) – the only popular commercial brand at the time. Hardly could any Nigerian tertiary hospital own a unit, let alone several units to support the teeming population of simultaneously distressed neonates. The Nigerian tertiary hospitals resorted to the unsafe use of a makeshift technique known as 'improvised bubble CPAP (ibCPAP)' (figure 1B). The ibCPAP could barely support neonates of 2000 g birthweight or above. However, Nigeria's highest burden of RDS is among much smaller neonates of 1500g and below – these categories still died, nevertheless. High cost of purchase and device efficiency became the monsters preventing many RDS-suffering neonates from surviving. Hence, RDS became my next battle target in the pursuit of further solutions against Nigeria's high neonatal mortality to save the life of the Nigerian neonate. The aim of this design and production project was to develop and trial a low-cost bubble-CPAP machine with high performance efficiency, capable of supporting extremely low-birthweight neonates, such as 600 g birthweight. The design was robustly engineered integrating the considerations of Nigeria's peculiar climate and culture. Therefore, the design features a twin compressor

which work simultaneously, but are also capable of independent operation in the rare event of accidental shutdown of one compressor. This enables the device to keep running on one compressor whilst arrangement is being made to restore the failed compressor. A gasblending module in the design enables the device to accept a pre-selected individual flowrate of pure oxygen from a cylinder and atmospheric air supplied via the compressor, respectively, appropriately mixes these to achieve the desired FiO<sub>2</sub> before delivering the mixture to the warming chamber in the inspirational channel of the system. This process eliminates the risks of ROP which has long terrorised the Nigerian neonate. The device also incorporates air warming capability, hence eliminating the risks of iatrogenic hypothermia, and specifically contributes its supports in the regulated warming of the neonate's internal organs (figure 3).

Figure 3: Design configuration for PoliteheartCPAP machine



- A – atmospheric airflow
- B – pure-oxygen flow
- C, G – flow meter
- D, H, J – gas manifolds
- E – air filtration chambers
- F – twin compressors
- I – gas blending module
- K – bacteria filter
- M – humidifier
- N – warming chamber
- W – PEEP bottle
- T – Supply to neonate

The resulting 'PoliteheartCPAP' machine, (PATENT: NG/PT/NC/2018/2689), was completed, and with three final prototype models and ethical clearance from the Niger State Ministry of Health, the systems were subjected to rigorous clinical trialling at the SCBU of Jummai Babangida Maternal and Neonatal Hospital Minna, University of Abuja Teaching Hospital

(UATH) Gwagwalada Abuja, and University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) Benin-city [8]. The characterisation study of the device was commenced, lasting for three months of laborious tests and system tweaking. A scientific research article was developed which also completed its rigorous peer-review process and was published by Paediatrics and International Child

Health [9]. It was possible to assemble the PoliteheartCPAP device at a delivery cost of NGN750,000 from January 2018, hence, putting pressure on the existing commercial brands (figure 4). The high efficiency and affordability of the device has succeeded in making the PoliteheartCPAP an agent of the needed market shakeup, significantly forcing down the overall average cost

of other commercial brands of CPAP machines in Nigeria – with the cost of the aforementioned Fisher-&Paykle model dropping down from NGN6.5 million to NGN3.5 million at NISONM Kaduna conference in June 2019 – only two years after the launch of the PoliteheartCPAP system.



Figure 4: The original model of PoliteheartCPAP

## POLITEHEART bCPAP – appropriate & affordable



It also became necessary to create another version of the product which could be able to operate without the need of conventional electricity

for the benefit of the Nigerian neonate who is far away at remote locations of the country. Therefore, the PoliteheartCPAP v-model (figure 5) was

thus designed and developed. This has the capability of running on low-voltage supply with its integrated oxygen concentrator. The v-model

can directly run on solar power from charging panels or on battery-stored energy in the rural villages of Nigeria.

Figure 5: PoliteheartCPAP, the v-model



This unique capability of the v-model has now provided the confidence of taking the battle against RDS-induced neonatal deaths to the rural areas where over 60% of the needy Nigerian neonates are located. Overall, the PoliteheartCPAP machine has currently made it possible for a Nigerian SCBU such as The Amina Centre of the Maternal & Neonatal Hospital Minna, to operate a fleet of eight (8) functional non-invasive ventilators thereby providing adequate coverage of support for all needy neonates at the centre at any given time. A more recent model of the system incorporates an inbuilt pulse-oximeter. This enables it to provide the clinician with real-time values of neonate's vi-

tal signs such as the oxygen saturation level (spO<sub>2</sub>), the respiration rate (RR) and the pulse rate (PR) (figure 6). Thus, with the politeheartCPAP machine, RDS is partly sorted for the Nigerian healthcare system and for the clinicians who truly wish to save the neonates under their care in Nigeria. The system's low-cost and extremely cheap operational consumables (only ₦230/treatment as compared to ₦26,000 for F-&P model) have paved the way for wise neonatal centres to acquire several units in their fleet to avail the teeming population of their needy neonates the opportunity of surviving RDS.

Figure 6: PoliteheartCPAP with incorporated pulseoximeter (P)



4.2. Oxygen delivery blender – PoliteO2blend (2019)

It was good news for the Nigerian neonate when the politeheartCPAP helped to force down the cost of commercial

brand CPAP machines in Nigeria by a whopping over 90% in 2018. However, the sheer high numbers of neonates that could be distressed at the same in a centre still required for more deployable devices

at cheaper rates. The politeheartCPAP is very efficient in supporting extremely tiny neonates but its fine technologies could be tweaked for a cheaper design that could still be effective but essentially for bigger neonates. Therefore, I came up with the idea of designing the politeO2 blend (Figure 7).

The new design was to consolidate the confidence of having enough intelligent devices in each SCBU to go round all needy neonates. The device design and production were to aim an overall application cost of as little as NGN200,000 per device but can efficiently support neonates of 1300 g and above. It was aimed to be portable and incorporating inbuilt air compressor and capable of delivering over 6

LPM of atmospheric air for blending with oxygen inflow. A Nigerian SCBU could split the available funds to get combinations of politeheartCPAP machines targeting all classes of neonates and the politeO2blend targeting bigger neonates to boost the fleet number, hence, reaching more needy neonates per unit time. This is the strategy currently in use at some places such as the Alex-Ekwueme Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The politeO2blend could be clinically used as a neonatal life-support system in three ways for a mildly or moderately distressed neonate and has contributed immensely to saving many neonatal lives in Nigeria since its launch in 2019.

Figure 7: The politeO2blend at AE-FTH Abakaliki

## One device Three Respiratory support functions



1. Prophylactic AIR therapy – self generated and humidified 4.5 LPM air
2. Blended O<sub>2</sub> supplement – blends its 4.5 LPM air with up to 3 LPM of O<sub>2</sub> flow based on desired FiO<sub>2</sub> - mildly distressed neonates
3. Bubble CPAP – expiratory leg of nasal cannula extended and inserted into graduated water bottle to generate a PEEP - severely distressed neonates



### 4.3. Oxygen multiplier device – The Politexygen Splitter System, PSS, (2019)

Can I boost the utility of a single oxygen source, such as an oxygen cylinder or oxygen concentrator, by up to 700%? This question kept rumbling in my mind until I made a move with a design and commenced a development project for what originally seemed impossible.

My battle to deliver the life-saving breath to the Nigerian neonate always had another ugly limitation that had always been a nightmare for the Nigerian SCBU. This was insufficiency of deployable oxygen to reach all needy neonates at a given time, especially during busy periods of admission. A lot of neonates have lost their lives whilst waiting for too long for a refilled oxygen cylinder or oxygen concentrator to become available for such a neonate. They died because they ‘could not breathe’ and could not be given oxygen owing to insufficiency or unavailability. I began to brainstorm on any possible frugal ways I could make oxygen cheaply available to reach every neonate who needed this within the ward without complications.

The design and installation of a frugal oxygen multiplier device was the idea I came up with in 2019 when challenged with the problems being presented by numerous items of oxygen cylinders and concentrators, which had to be brought into the SCBU

to serve many neonates who required various kinds of oxygen therapy at the same time, some for only a tiny supplement of 0.5 LPM oxygen flow. The possibility of having as many as 10 neonates or more in need of oxygen therapy at the same time in a big SCBU would often set-off the high traffic of frenzy movements of these items across units, corridors, workshops, plant houses, and from outside the hospital premises – all into the already busy practice space of the SCBU. This presents adverse problems such as:

(A) Deafening noise pollution from many oxygen concentrators running in the same small room simultaneously.

(B) Uncontrollable radiant heat generation from the oxygen concentrators affecting neonatal thermoneutral control, often overwarming neonates in cots for another undesirable complications. (C) High power consumption incurred in running up to seven or eight concentrators to produce a total oxygen flowrate that could easily be produced by only one concentrator, hence saving on operational cost. A hospital standard oxygen concentration can generate up to 10 LPM flowrate of pure oxygen, and some neonates’ need for lifesaving therapy may be as little as 1 LPM flowrate of breathable oxygen.

(D) Relatively higher cost on overhead is incurred due to the maintenance of more devices than required at work

simultaneously.

(E) There is high congestion of available free space within the SCBU wards due to multiple numbers of cylinders and O<sub>2</sub> concentrators as required, obstructing easy movement and workflow.

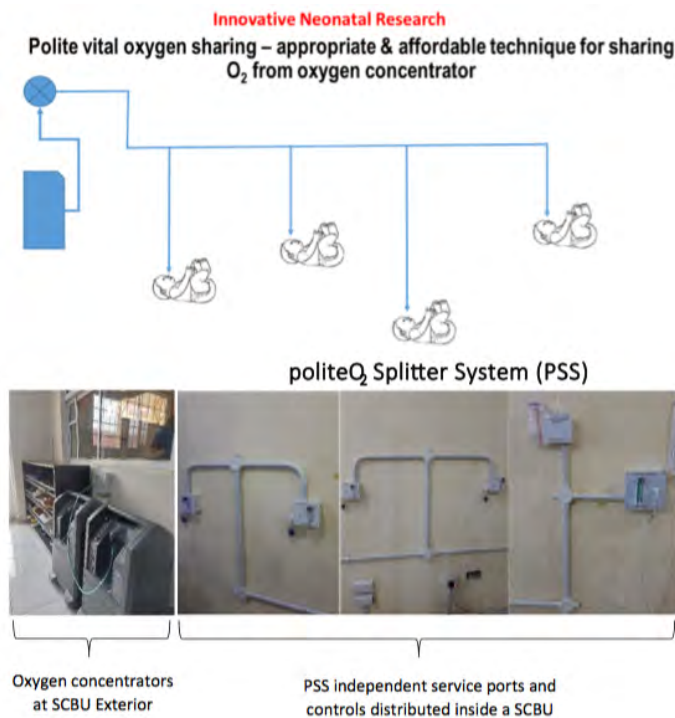
(F) Too many cylinders in the way of movement become hazards as nurses and doctors could accidentally bump into these causing injuries, especially when this involves falling tall cylinders.

(G) Oxygen replacement from the Works Department often comes at high infection risks as both cylinders and those bringing them are high contagious transmitters of killer microscopic organism that infect our neonates, leading to the death of many.

Prior to my design, the Nigerian practice could only deliver oxygen in the ratio of one oxygen cylinder to one neonate, or one oxygen-concentrator to one neonate. The aim was to design a system that could enable one oxygen source to support more than one neonate simultaneously to decongest the SCBU but at the same time serving more needy neonates. Design would be such that the oxygen source could be left outside of the SCBU to minimise the negative impact of heat generation and noise pollution from oxygen-concentrators, and infection control due to the high traffic of dirty oxygen cylinders in and out of the SCBU.

I launched out a design of an affordable frugal system that could minimise or remove these adverse situations to reduce morbidity and save more neonatal lives. The Politexygen Splitter System (PSS) was designed and trialled at the Amina Centre in Minna, where the system was scientifically characterised (figure 8). This was later installed at the Teaching Hospital Abakaliki where its performance characteristics were optimized and data analyses peer-reviewed and published in the Proceedings of the national conference of Paediatrics Association of Nigeria, Kano, January 2020 [10–11]. The system enables up to eight neonates to share a single source of oxygen supply such as the cylinder or concentrator. It also enables the oxygen source (cylinder or concentrator) to be installed outside the main hall of the SCBU, thereby eliminating noise, infection transmission, hazards, and congestion of the SCBU space. Each neonate’s supply is independently controlled in the network of the PSS installation as can be seen from the video from my installations at FMC Owerri in 2022 [12]. The device also featured among others during a CNN documentary of my humble humanitarian outreaches and contributions towards the survival of the Nigerian neonate in the July 2022 edition of ‘Inside Africa’ programme [13].



Figure 8: The PoliteO<sub>2</sub>-Splitter-System (PSS)

## 5. Conclusion

Inability to breathe carries the greatest risks of suffocation, lack of oxygen in the human tissues, and ultimately death, even in adults. Breathing in human is autonomously driven but when this fails, an emergency mechanical support is required to save such life. Newborn neonates in Nigeria often die from respiratory failures due to a widespread lack of the necessary apparatuses and the consumables to deliver emergency assisted breathing. Notable among these were unaffordability of neonatal ventilators for driving the breathing mechanism for the completely distressed neonate, and insufficiency of oxygen supply to simultaneously support a vast number of needy neonates at the same time. These were like problems of impossible solutions for a typical special care baby

unit (SCBU) across the entire nation as at 2017 conference of the Nigerian Society of Neonatal Medicine at Ibadan, Oyo State.

The innovation of my non-invasive neonatal ventilator, the PoliteheartCPAP machine, brought an immediate turnaround of the situation for the vast number of the Nigerian tertiary centres who deployed this. The device helped to drastically reduce neonatal mortality by lowering the affordability of the technology by more than 90% (from NGN6,500,000 for imported brand of the device to NGN750,000 of the PoliteheartCPAP at a commensurate success rate even for the tiny neonates of 600 g birthweight). Since introduction in 2018, the affordability of the technology has enabled a widespread usage across Nigerian such as at UMTH

Maiduguri, UATH Gwagwalada, UCTH Calabar, FMC Jabi, UIITH Ilorin, FETH Abakaliki, Amina-centre Minna, Calabar Women & Children Hospital Calabar, etc. Hence, hospitals who could hardly afford one unit of the technology to save one neonate per unit time, could afterwards use about the same cost of an imported brand to build up a fleet of eight units of the technology, saving up to eight distressed neonates simultaneously per unit time, like the situation at Niger State owned Maternal and Neonatal Hospital Minna. In addition, this technology has also reduced the operational cost of delivering the treatment per patient in terms of consumables, from NGN26,000 to NGN230 per treatment and delivering better quality of treatment and success rate compared to the imported brand.

A huge amount of benefits in lifesaving and cost savings are derived from the polite-oxygen-splitter-system (the PSS). This innovation is currently making it possible for a SCBU to provide oxygen support to up to eight neonates using a single oxygen cylinder. As such, the system boosts oxygen deploy-ability by 700% for the teeming population of needy neonates. This is also up to 700% savings in the cost of oxygen therapy as one cylinder is used in the place of eight. Noise pollution from oxygen concentrators is reduced by up to 700%, operational and maintenance costs are drastically reduced using the PSS, and infection rate is drastically reduced due to reduced cylinder traffic, all cumulatively boosting neonatal survivability from oxygen requirement by up to 700%.

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Akachi Ezeigbo, a multiple award-winning prolific writer and international scholar, has taught in three universities in Nigeria – University of Lagos, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, (AE-FUNAI) and Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, in Ebonyi State – as well as in South Africa and the United Kingdom. She was a three-time Head of English Department at University of Lagos (Unilag) and received the Best Researcher Award in the Arts and the Humanities from Unilag in 2005. She has been awarded visiting Fellowships in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Germany and has given Keynote Lectures in universities in the USA.

Apart from academic books and scholarly articles in local and international journals, she has published in all genres of literature: she is a poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer and children's book author, writing under the pen name Akachi Ezeigbo. Among her over 50 books are: *the trilogy, The Last of the Strong Ones, House of Symbols and Children of the Eagle; Trafficked; Roses and Bullets; Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War; Gender Issues in Nigeria; Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model and Women and Leadership in Igboland: Omoku, Ime Chi and Omugwo Institutions*. Ezeigbo was a joint winner of The Nigeria Prize for Literature (NPL) in 2007 with her children's novel *My Cousin Sammy*.

Other literary prizes she won include WORDOC Short Story Prize (1994), ANA/Spectrum Prize for Prose (2001), Zulu Sofola Prize (2001), NDDC/Flora Nwapa Prize (2003), ANA/Atiku Abubakar Children's Literature Prize (2008), ANA/Cadbury Poetry Prize (2009), African Literature Association (ALA) Best Short Story Award (2020), First Prize in the International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace (IFLAC) Haiku Competition (2021) and the 2022 Fonlon-Nichols Award for Excellence in Creative Writing and

Contributions to the Struggle for Human Rights and Freedom of Expression. She is a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL), the Literary Society of Nigeria (FLSN), English Scholars Association of Nigeria (FESAN) and Association of Nigerian Authors (FANA). Akachi Ezeigbo was the Vice President of PEN International, Nigeria Centre (2002-2011) and Vice President of Women Writers Association of Nigeria – WRITA (1995-1999).

She is a director in the Board of Directors of University Press PLC, Ibadan, and was a former member of the Governing Council of the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba, 2018-2021. In February 2021, Ezeigbo was appointed a member of the Board of Trustees of IRUKA: Centre for the Study of the Future of Igbo. She was the chair of the Panel of Judges for The Nigeria Prize for Literature, in the Children Literature category (2011), and in March 2021 was appointed chair of the Advisory Board for The Nigeria Prize for Literature & The Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism sponsored by Nigeria LNG. She is the chairperson, Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Literature 2023.

Member, Advisory Board

## Prof. Olu Obafemi



Prof Obafemi is a retired Professor of English and Dramatic Literature of the University of Ilorin Nigeria where he taught for 44 years till his retirement in the year 2020. He is a playwright, novelist, poet, literary scholar, theatre director, translator and newspaper columnist. He was chairman of the Board of the National Museums and Monuments, Director of Research, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, and is currently the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council, Federal University of Technology, Minna.

Professor Olu Obafemi was president and Fellow of the Association of Nigerian Authors, fellow and president of the

Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL), fellow and trustee of the Society of the Nigerian Theatre Artists (fsona), fellow of the English Scholars Association of Nigeria (fesan) and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Nigerian Media Merit Award.

Professor Olu Obafemi serves on many committees of educational agencies of the National Universities Commission, (NUC), Tertiary Education Fund (Tetfund) and JAMB.

He is the sole recipient of the 2018 Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM). He is a member of the NLNG Advisory Board of the Nigeria Prize for Literature 2023.

Member, Advisory Board

## Prof. Ahmed Yerima



Ahmed Yerima is a Playwright, Play Director, Actor, Cultural Administrator, and Lecturer. He attended University of Ife (1981) University College, Cardiff, Wales (1982) and Royal Holloway College, University of London for his Doctorate degree (1986). He was the Director-General of the National Theatre and National Troupe of Nigeria. He is also an award-winning playwright who has written plays such as *Yemoja*, *Abobaku*, *Orisha Ibeji*, *Mojagbe*, *Pegunrun* and *Osun* to name but a few. His recent plays are *Aremu*, *Sanusi*, and *Sardauna*. His play, *Hard Ground*, won the Nigeria Prize for Literature. He has also served as a judge in the drama category of the 2014 NLNG Prize for Liter-

ature. He served as the Director-General of the Abuja Carnival (2007-9). He has packaged cultural productions on behalf of Nigeria all over the world at festivals and carnivals.

He is a fellow of the Society of the Nigerian Theatre Artistes (SONTA), National Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners (NANTAP) and a fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL). Presently, he teaches at the Redeemer's University where he serves as professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies. He is also the provost of the College of Postgraduate Studies. He is a member, Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Literature 2023.

Chairman, Panel of Judges

## Prof. Ameh Dennis Akoh



Ameh Dennis Akoh is a professor of drama and critical theory at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI), Nigeria. He was born on 16th June, 1970 at Iyano in Ibaji Local Government Area of Kogi State where he had his primary and secondary schools education. He thereafter attended the universities of Jos and Ibadan, Nigeria for his university education. He has taught across five Nigerian universities, namely University of Jos, University of Ibadan (as teaching assistant), Kogi State University, Osun State University and now, AE-FUNAI. His areas of research interest include critical theory, dramatic criticism, sociology of literature and theatre, gender, postcolonial and cultural studies from which he has over 60 publications in refereed local and international journals and books. He is a Fellow of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (FSONTA) and the Corporate Administration Institute of Nigeria (FCAI), as well as a 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award winner of SONTA, among many awards and distinctions. In 2014 he won the AHP postdoctoral fellowship of the American Council of Learned Societies. He was also visiting postdoctoral Fellow at Rhodes University, South Africa between February and April, 2015. He has enjoyed research and travel grants from TETFund, Indian Intercontinental and Cultural Association (IICA) and European Research Council (ERC).

He has held many administrative positions within the university system which include: Sub-Dean of Arts and Humanities

at the Kogi State University, Anyigba (2006-2009), Head of the Department of Languages and Linguistics (2010-2012), Acting Dean of Culture (2012-2013), Dean of Humanities and Provost/Head of Campus (2014-2015), Director of General Studies (2015-2016) at the Osun State University (UNIOSUN), Head of Department (2017-2018), Director of Research and Development (2018-2019), Dean of Postgraduate Studies (2019-2020), Member, Governing Council (2019-2022) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic [2020-2022]) at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI).

Professor Akoh is listed in The Year's Work in English Studies (YWES) Index of Critics (vol.88, Iss.1, 2009, pp. 1279-1307 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ywes/map020>). He is a member of several professional associations/societies including Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), African Theatre Association (AFTA), Nigerian Society of Indigenous Knowledge and Development (NSIKAD), International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS), International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), International Theatre Institute (ITI), Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) and Centre for Research on Men and Masculinities (CROMM), Australia.

Professor Akoh is married with children.



Member, Panel of Judges

## Prof. Osita Catherine Ezenwanebe



Osita Catherine Ezenwanebe Ph.D is a Professor of Theatre Arts and Head, Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria, where she teaches and mentors graduate and postgraduate students. She has a B.A in English Education, two Master of Arts Degrees in English Literature (Drama and Society) and in English Language (Nigerian English), and a Ph.D in English Literature (Drama and Society). She is a Senior Fulbright Scholar and a Visiting Professor of Dramatic Arts, 2011/2012 in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Winston-Salem State University, North Carolina, USA. She has published numerous academic papers in local and international journals. Prof. Osita C. Ezenwanebe is a dramatic critic, a playwright and a gender

scholar. she has written and produced ten stage plays: *Withered Thrust* (2007), *The Dawn of Full Moon* (2009), *Giddy Festival* (2009), *Daring Destiny* (2011), *Adaugo* (2011), *Shadows on Arrival* (2012), *Egg without Yolk* (2014), *Debris of Greatness* (2015), *String of Tales* (2016), *Ruptured Stream* (2018) and *Scars of Life* (2019), out of which seven are published. She is a member of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR), Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) and African Theatre Association (AFTA), among others.

Osita likes aerobics, praying, reading, watching plays and knitting. She is married with children.

Member, Panel of Judges

## Prof. Rasheedah Aliyu Liman



Professor Rasheedah Aliyu Liman is a Professor of Theatre and Development Communication at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. She has authored over 30 research papers in reputable journals and has 18 years of teaching experience. Her published plays include; *Hustlers* (2018) and *Heart of a Woman* (2019). Professor Liman recently concluded a 5 years tenure as the Head of the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts and lead researcher at the Centre

of Excellence on Development Communication. Professor Liman is a Fulbright Scholar, an American Council of Learned Societies fellow (ACLS), Heidelberg Spring Academy fellow. She is a SONTA Life Time Achiever awardee, British Council Festival Management Awardee, American Alumni TIES Awardee, and several others. She has served on several scholarship boards and committees. She enjoys reading, traveling, and sports.

# HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

(YEAR, GENRE, WINNING ENTRY, PRIZE RECIPIENT)

<b>Poetry</b> – <i>Nomad</i> by Romeo Oriogun	2022	<b>Prose</b> – <i>The Son of the House</i> by Cheluchi Onyemelukwe	2021
<b>Placed on hold due to Covid</b>	2020	<b>Children's Literature</b> – <i>Boom Boom</i> by Jude Idada	2019
<b>Drama</b> – <i>Embers</i> by Soji Cole	2018	<b>Poetry</b> – <i>The Heresaid</i> by Ikeogu Oke	2017
<b>Prose</b> – <i>Season of Crimson Blossoms</i> by Abubakar A Ibrahim	2016	<b>Children's Literature</b> – No winner	2015
<b>Drama</b> – <i>Iredi War</i> by Prof Sam Ukala	2014	<b>Poetry</b> – <i>The Sahara Testament</i> by Tade Ipadeola	2013
<b>Prose</b> – <i>On Black Sisters' Street</i> by Chika Unigwe	2012	<b>Children's Literature</b> – <i>The Missing Clock</i> by Adeleke Adeyemi	2011
<b>Drama</b> – <i>Cemetery Road</i> by Esiaba Irobi	2010	<b>Poetry</b> – No winner	2009
<b>Prose</b> – <i>Yellow Yellow</i> by Kaine Agari	2008	<b>Children's Literature</b> – <i>My Cousin Sammy and The Readers' Theatre</i> by Prof Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Chief Mabel Segun	2007
<b>Drama</b> – <i>Hard Ground</i> by Dr. Ahmed Yerima	2006	<b>Poetry</b> – (1) <i>Chants of a Minstrel</i> by Prof Ezenwa Oheato; (2) <i>The Dreamer, His Vision</i> by Dr. Gabriel Okara	2005
<b>No winner</b>	2004		

# THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM

The Nigerian Prize for Literary Criticism currently has a cash value of \$10,000 (Ten Thousand US Dollars). Literary critiquing explores and enhances thought processes for the understanding of literature. The prize is open to literary critics from all over the world critiquing Nigerian literature. The Advisory Board for Literature oversees the administration of The Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism and the judges for The Nigeria Prize for Literature serve as judges for the Literary Criticism Prize. The winners of this Prize are presented at the public presentation of winners of The Nigeria Prize for Literature.

For each year of the competition, contestants shall send in three or more critical essays published in a major literary/scholarly journal. The literary/scholarly journal must have a long and proven track record of dedication to excellence and must have an international circulation. No critical essay previously submitted to this competition may be considered at a later date, even if major revisions have been made to it. Manuscripts are not eligible for consideration, as all submissions must be published done in the year of the competition or three years prior to the call for entries.

## HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM

(YEAR, WINNING ENTRY, PRIZE RECIPIENT)



The black soul is (still) a white man's artefact? Postcoloniality, post- Fanonism and the tenacity of race(ism) in A. Igoni Barret's Blackass  
This uprising will bring out the beast in us: The cultural afterlife of 'Beasts of no nations'  
Writing about the dead in present tense: Half of a Yellow Sun as a work of postmemory.



Self-Publishing in the era of military rule in Nigeria, 1985 – 1999, Postcolonial Ogres in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Wizard of the Crow, and Land of cemetery: funereal images in the poetry of Musa Idris Okpanachi by Dr Uche Peter Umezurike.



No Competition due to Covid



Reinventing the Primordial: Human Blood Ritual and The Lure of Power in Esiaba Irobi's Nwokedi by Dr Abba A Abba.



Bayonet and Carnage of Tongues: The Contemporary Nigerian Poet Speaking Truth To Power by Prof Isidore Diala.



# MEET THE CONTENDER FOR THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM - DR EYOH ETIM

## The Biography of Dr Eyoh Etim

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Eyoh Etim is a novelist, poet and lecturer at Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa, Nigeria. He has a PhD in African Literature and Criticism from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Among his published works are Past Echoes (novella, 2005), He Repented Again (Novella, 2006), Missed Calls (Novella, 2007), The Infantist Manifesto (Literary Criticism, 2008), Alien Citizens (Novel, 2012), Songs of our Time (Poetry, 2013), Don't Marry Angelica (Novella, 2014), Virtual Chants (Poetry, 2020) and Afro Rococo (Poetry, 2022).

Born on Tuesday the 29th of March 1983, Dr Eyoh Etim hails from Ikot Etim Ntung in Atabong Clan, Okobo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. He was, however, mostly raised in Ekpene Ukim in Uruan Local Government Area and in Bekumu, Cameroon, where his late father plied his trade as an entrepreneur. He attended Government Primary School, Bekumu, Cameroon, and St Thomas' R.C.M School, Ekpene Ukim, where he obtained his First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) in 1995 at Merit Level.

Eyoh Etim obtained his Secondary School Certificate from Adiaha



Obong Secondary School, Ekpene Ukim in 2001. He taught briefly at Uduak Abasi Nursery and Primary School, Ituk Mbang, Uruan, before gaining admission to study English at the University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria, in 2003. His undergraduate research project was entitled ‘The Politics of Survival in Naguib Mahfouz’s Children of Gebelawi and Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero. He graduated with Second Class Upper Division in 2008 and served as a Youth Corps member teaching English and Literature at Akanu Ibiam Grammar School, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, from 2008 to 2009.

While studying for his Master’s degree, Eyoh Etim taught English and Literature at Royal Pearls College (now defunct), Shelter Afrique, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. He has also taught at Pegasus High School, Eket, where he taught Literature to WAEC and IGCSE candidates. Eyoh Etim completed his Master of Arts degree in English Literature from the University of Uyo, Uyo, in 2012. His dissertation was entitled, ‘Physics in Literary Imagination: An Interdisciplinary Study of Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace and Garcia Marquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera.

Eyoh Etim joined the Department of English, Uniuyo, as a Part-time lecturer the same year. The following year, he got a full time appointment as a lecturer in the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University where he currently teaches. In 2021, Eyoh Etim completed his PhD in African Literature and Criticism at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. His thesis was entitled, ‘Leadership Failure and the Historicity of Selected Postcolonial Malawian Prose Narratives’.

Apart from his creative and imaginative works, Dr Eyoh Etim has published scholarly articles in high impact journals. Some of these articles are ‘Menoir and Rememory: Remembering Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Jack Mapanje’s And Crocodiles Are Hungry at Night’ published by Journal for Cultural Research in 2020; ‘Herstroy’ Versus ‘Histroy’: A Motherist Rememory in Akachi Ezeigbo’s The Last of the Strong Ones and Chimamanda Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun’ published by Cogent Arts and Humanities in 2020; and ‘The Historicity of Individuals and the Five Hs in Selected Poems of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare’ published by Quest Journal in 2019.

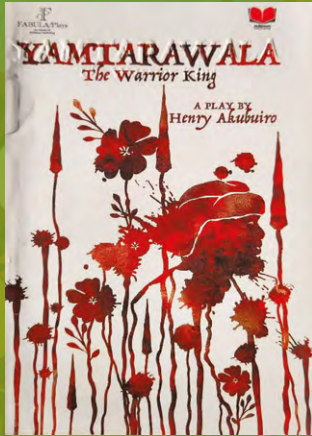
Eyoh Etim has attended academic conferences both local and international, including the Fourth Postcolonial Narrations Conference in 2016 at Munich, Germany, and the Third Memory Studies Conference held in Madrid, Spain, in 2019. In 2023, Eyoh Etim won a two-month research fellowship at Newcastle University, the United Kingdom, sponsored by the Gerda Henkel Foundation in conjunction with the Memory Studies Association (MSA), where he studied the effects of dictatorship on women and children in Nazi and Malawian literary texts.

Dr Eyoh Etim runs a literary blog (eyohetim.com), which he uses to promote Nigerian works and to interpret extant literary texts recommended by WAEC, NECO, JAMB, JUPEB and IGCSE for students in schools and colleges. Dr Etim has a vision to establish a literary magazine to discourse the emerging issues in Nigerian and African Literature, among other projects.

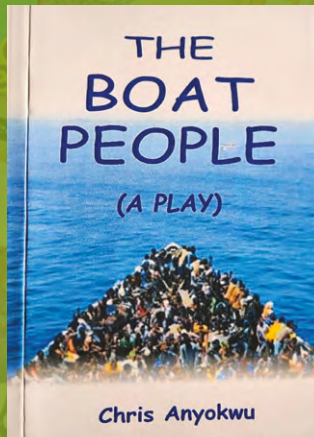


# THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

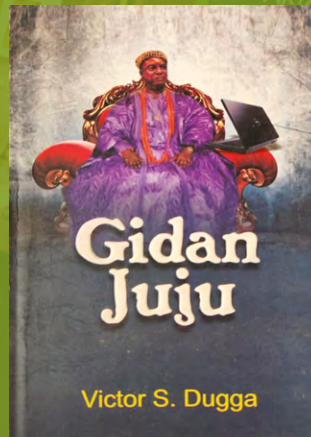
- THE LONGLIST OF 11 -



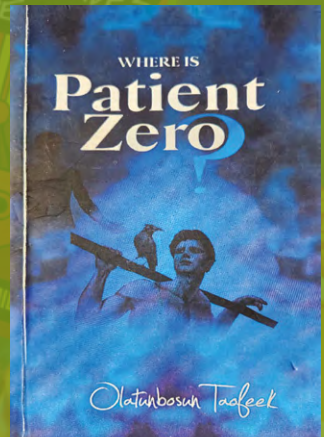
**Yamtarawala**  
Henry Akubuiro



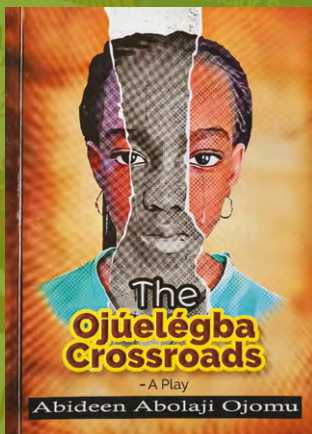
**The Boat People**  
Christopher Anyokwu



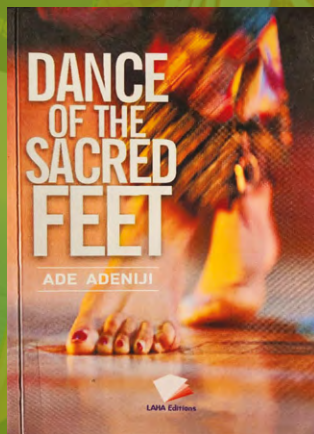
**Gidan Juju**  
Victor S. Dugga



**Where Is Patient Zero**  
Olatunbosun Taofeek



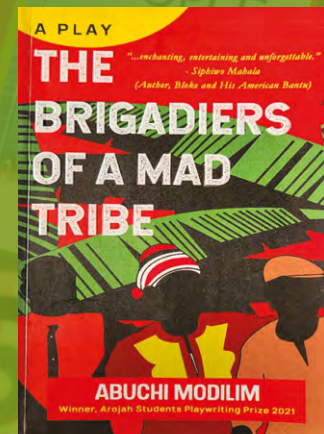
**The Ojuelegba Crossroads**  
Abideen Abolaji Ojomu



**Dance of The Sacred Feet**  
Ade Adeniji



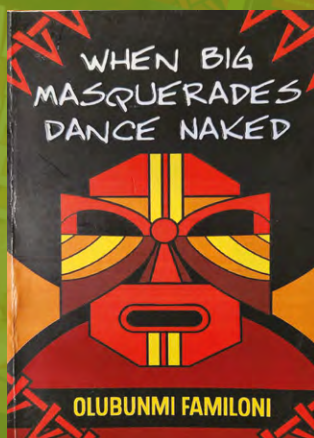
**Grit**  
Obari Gomba



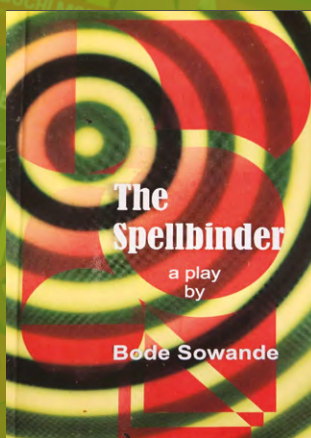
**The Brigadiers of a Mad Tribe**  
Abuchi Modilim



**Home Coming**  
Cheta Igbokwe



**When Big Masquerades Dance Naked**  
Olubunmi Familoni



**The Spellbinder**  
Bode Sowande





# Synopsis of Nigeria's Best 11

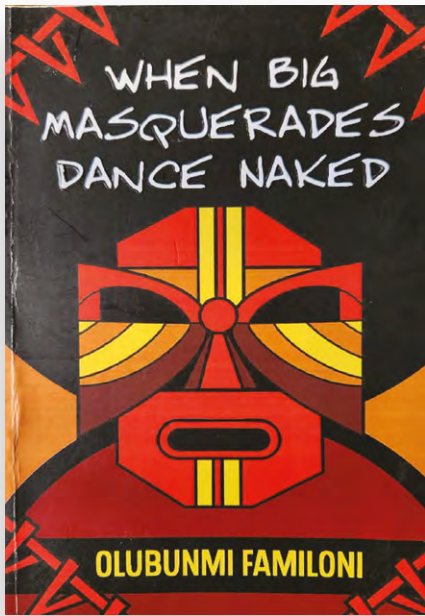
## Drama Books of the Year



Compilation by  
**Emma Nwatu**  
Senior Editorial and Digital Content Advisor, NLNG







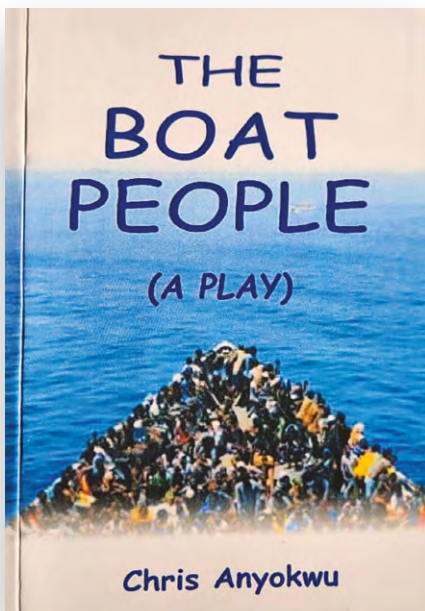
## When Big Masquerades Dance Naked

Olubunmi Familoni



**A** SATIRE on power, corruption, and greed in the fictional town of Ileko-ro, where political office holders connive with traditional rulers to trample on the rights and common wealth of the masses. But their oppression does not go without opposition as manifested in the character of Ijoba and his ilk, who

struggle relentlessly to light a torch of hope for the people through the long, tortuous nights. *When Big Masquerades Dance Naked* is not just a limpid portrayal of our social realities, it is a play that calls everyone to action; a treatise on how truth trumps darkness and prevails in the advancement of our common humanity.



## The Boat People

Christopher Anyokwu



**I**T dramatises the extant global subject of mass migration from the so-called peripheries and margins, especially African countries, to the metropolitan centres in western Europe and North America. In the face of insufferably harsh socio-economic hardships and political upheavals, pauperised human flot-sam and jetsam sell off their worldly possessions to raise money to fund their emigration overseas. Due to inability to secure valid travel visas, most Africans risk danger and death

as they seek to enter Europe via the Sahara Desert and traveling aboard rickety overburdened boats across the Mediterranean sea enroute Europe. On the whole, the African Diaspora is a little better than second slavery, all things considered. The play places on the front burner the extremely urgent need for governments in Africa to make and implement people-oriented policies and programmes with a view to catering to the needs of their citizenry.



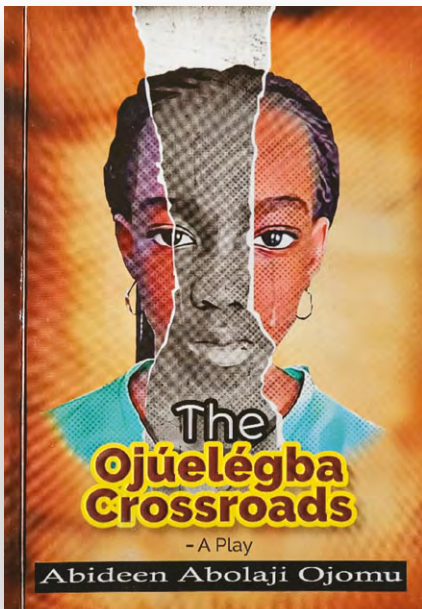
## Homecoming

Cheta Igbokwe



The play chronicles the lives of the couple Nwakibe and Adannaya Echeruo, who desperately searches for their missing son, Nebeolisa. It also follows Johnson, a writer, in search of a story for his new book. The play shuttles between Nwakibe's sitting room and Ahumaraze's shrine

where the duo rethink their past and negotiate their future. At the end of every meeting, Nwakibe returns home to share his experiences with Johnson. It is a story of quest, love, discovery, and how what one finds in life is capable of slipping through one's hands.



## The Ojuelegba Crossroads

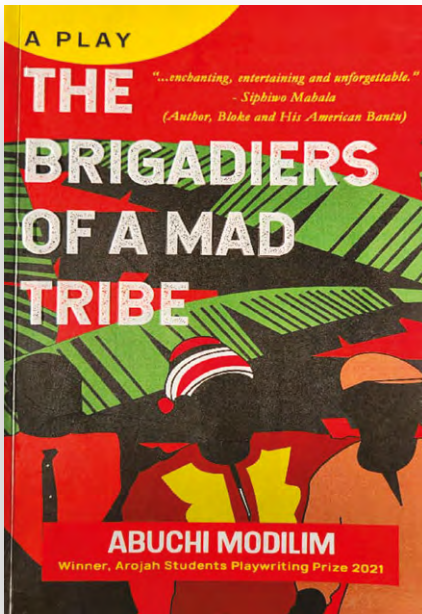
Abideen Abolaji Ojomu



THE African plane is a place of many existential issues - war, poverty, drought, desertification, pollution, and other socioeconomic concerns. This is partly due to our trust and belief in foreignness more than we do in our ancestral ways. This leads to the loss of our most valuable asset; the ways of our forefathers - our culture. And now we Africans that hold the key to the world, are at the mercy of others. The Ojuelegba Crossroads; Ogúlútú, that sacred

clod of the elders, that single rock that hits a thousand different targets at once. This is a play of plays. It seeks to return the truths the colonials have effaced from our collective consciousness - the greatness of our skin, the purity of our mind, the braveness of our fathers, and a strength that defies all obstacles. The work is themed around a famous crossroad in Lagos, and extends itself to the diversity of people across cultures and races.





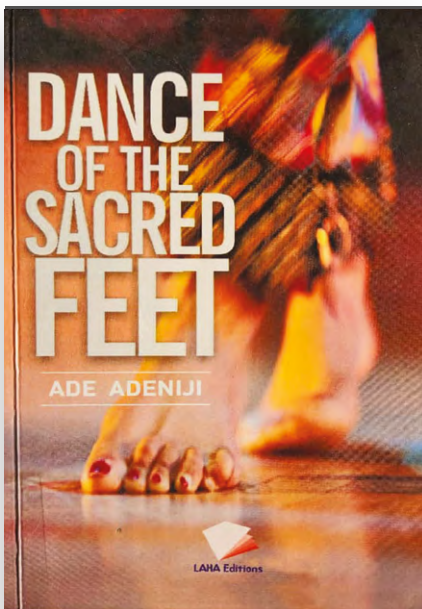
## The Brigadiers of a Mad Tribe

Abuchi Modilim



WHEN the Phoenix Black Science Organisation in Britain announces a prize (worth a hundred thousand pounds) for witches and wizards in Africa to use their powers to build a technology (Brain Cloud Facility) that would operate on African mysticism, a group of young men decide to take up the challenge. Being ordinary teachers, they go about recruiting a number of witches and a wizard to help

them achieve their aim, calling themselves The Brigadiers Order. Things begin to go haywire when The Brigadiers Order unexpectedly makes the prize shortlist. What follows is study of the volatility of the human character in momentous times. The play explores greed, chaos, and the evernagging socio-political problems that are the root of Africa's inability to make technological strides.



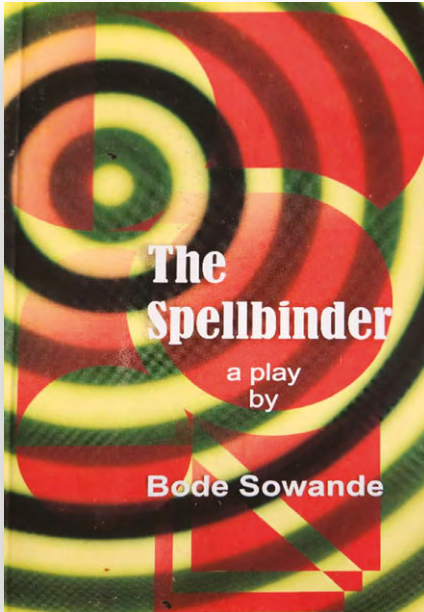
## Dance of The Sacred Feet

Ade Adeniji



AN immersive story that skillfully unravels the interplay between tradition and power, while accentuating the significance of unity and courage amidst adversity, the play draws the audience into a world that is enriched with cultural depth and mystical undertones, creating a thought-provoking and captivating experience. It unfolds with the demise of the ruler and weaves around a tapestry of intriguing

narratives which interlaces various themes, such as tradition, power, leadership, oppression, and unity. Central to the narrative are the intricate characters and subplots that unfold throughout the play, inviting the audience to explore the depth of human complexities. At its core, *Dance of the Sacred Feet* embodies the clash between tradition and modernity and the complexities of preserving customs in a rapidly evolving world.



## The Spellbinder

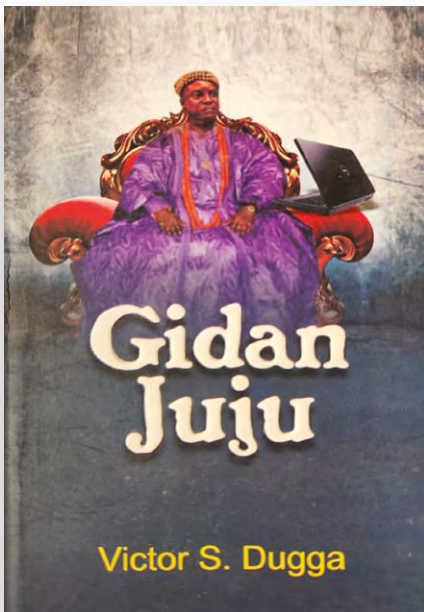
Bode Sowande



**L**OVE, be it of Filia, Eros, or Agape, always bonds magnetically.

In *Spellbinder*, friends in their youth with true nature of Eros will individually create the embers of slow creeping mental health challenges. As adults, two of the friends are billionaires whose fates will lock with a third billionaire. They each now have minor or major mental

health challenges. Two of the billionaires had in their youth formed a triangle of sex with same female who is the fire point in a crucible of mental health challenge.. Her filial carer is not spared and her son is on a slippery slope of desperation. It takes thirty years before EGO crumbles to allow healing through the genesis of another leap into love.



## Gidan Juju

Victor S. Dugga



**A** KING was deposed and taken away long ago in the heydays of colonial rule. He died in exile. Many years later, repatriation, restitution and return of cultural property have become a popular concept and his bones are to be returned. The lone traditionalist left to handle the burial rites dies just before the arrival of the bones.

This happens just as the kingdom was recovering from years of social dislocation. The new king has his own ideas of how to move the kingdom forward. In the absence of any traditionalists, modern processes are put in place to preserve the vibrant cultural heritage of the community.



## Grit

Obari Gomba



The play is set in a fictional community called Sonofa. It begins in an open place in Pa Nyimenu's compound, at night. The atmosphere is charged because there is a riot in the community. Pa Nyimenu's sons, Oyesllo and Okote, are at the centre of the crisis and they are in danger like their community. A history of social engagement and family tension, a political murder, and a contest for office put a wedge between Oyesllo and his brother.

Blinded by anger and rivalry, the brothers are unable to note that there are powerful figures that are orchestrating the conflict to destroy their family. Pa Nyimenu's effort to stabilize his family and save his sons fails. Oyesllo and Okote walk into a trap, but the tragedies are too widespread. The forces of violence choose an occasion that will cause multiple tragedies. In the unrest that follows, the society is threatened.



## Yamtarawala

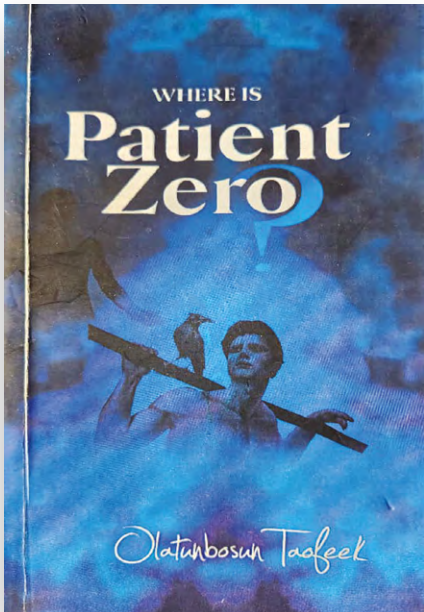
Henry Akubuiro



As the name implies, *Yamtarawala the Warrior King*, is a story of conquest by the great Yamta of Ngazargamu who leaves his village upset with a defeated aspiration of not being crowned king and goes on a war campaign defeating many kingdoms and ruling over them until he meets his doom in the hands of his own son. Amongst subject matters captured in the play are love, deception, women exploita-

tion, family, war, pride, etc. It is a historical drama that revisits the socio-political convulsions in 16th century Kanem-Bornu Empire, where leadership tussle by two princes led to the breaking away of the elder son, Yamtarawala, with 72 loyalists, in search of a new empire in Nigeria to dominate. The play centralises around the idea of ambition, power and the tale of Yamta's quest for rulership.





## Where Is Patient Zero?

Olatunbosun Taofeek



The play captures the attempt to cover the initial carrier of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) known as Patient Zero. With Dr Damsi parading himself as the messiah of the period, he skits and rolls with the rogue scientists covering their iniquitous in ASTRONAUT 666: a lethal potent network prepared to be inserted into humans as a form of vaccine to have access to human brains as a motor neuron control to the billions of people inhabiting the

world. The aim is to connect every human brain in a single interface at the speed of billisecond. In their scientific exploration is the intrusion of Thanatos, the spirit of death and his brother, Hypnos in escalating the negative part of their experiment and the eventual emergence of an uncontrollable virus. The virus quickly spreads down to Africa where we have Babanka the sitting President of a populous country in Africa.



Some playwrights from the Longlist of 11, with Andy Odeh, General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development, NLNG, at the 2023 CORA-NPL Book Party

# SHORTLIST OF THREE EMERGES

By Emma Nwatu

While the best 11 plays were still being celebrated in the media and public spaces and while permutations as to who would be making the shortlist were raging, the Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Literature Chaired by Prof Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo announced the shortlist of three.

A release by the General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development of NLNG, Sponsor of The Prizes, Andy Odeh on August 29th listed the shortlist as follows:



**Yamtarawala**  
Henry Akubuiro



**The Ojuelegba Crossroads**  
Abideen Abolaji Ojomu



**Grit**  
Obari Gomba

The Chairperson of the Advisory Board, Professor Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, had made the announcement in a live broadcast on the Prize's social media channels.

According to the Board, "the plays stand tall in terms of dramatology, language, performance, story, and structure. The Board also said the plays represent the pinnacle of literary craftsmanship and the artistic convergence that The Nigeria Prize for Literature tirelessly seeks."

The Board stated: "For *Grit* by Obari Gomba, the judges have applauded it as a great play that transcends its covers. Its pages unfold a captivating narrative that has clearly left an indelible mark and its production quality is nothing short of excellent.

*The Ojuelegba Crossroads* by Abideen Abolaji Ojomu has deeply resonated with the judges, who commend its rich exploration of our socio-political fabric. The play's ability to confront everyday struggles and

decision-making conflicts while aiming for a harmonious resolution underscores its significant impact.

"*Yamtarawala - The Warrior King* by Henry Akubuiro captured the judges' admiration for its dramatic twists, rendering it not only suited for the stage but also the screen. The narrative unfolds in ways that evoke a profound sense of engagement and excitement."

"Our dedicated judges and the Advisory Board over the years have consistently worked together to seamlessly blend the contemporary heartbeat with the essence of Nigerian literature. This Shortlist serves as a testament to this harmonious fusion and the enduring legacy of our nation's literary landscape," the Board added.

Immediately the shortlist was announced, attention shifted to the playwrights both in the media and public sphere.



# THREE PLAYWRIGHTS:

Endearing literature from  
the storyteller, for the theatre.

Interview of the Shortlist of Three for the  
2023 Nigeria Prize for Literature.

By **Titi Horsfall**







## An interview with Henry Akubuiro

### Please tell us about your background and childhood.

Henry Akubuiro was born in Agwa clan in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, an oil producing community. I belong to the generation that didn't experience the Nigerian Civil War. We only heard the Civil War stories.

Growing up was fun. I grew up in the village. My father was a middle class public servant who lived most of his life in Port Harcourt and Lagos. So, we grew up attending village primary and secondary schools in my hometown, and I eventually finished my secondary school in Oguta before I proceeded to Imo State University, Owerri, where I majored in English and Literary Studies. My childhood was a period where so many people didn't have television sets.

But my dad had a television and so many people were coming to watch television. As a kid, it was fascinating to see so many people gathering to watch TV. I'm talking about the 1980s, you know. It was a period where television wasn't common. Everybody was coming to our house to watch television. My father had a library of books at home.

He was an accountant but he was a lettered man. In fact, my first encounter with books was in his own personal library. He had all kinds of books, from literature, history to mathematics and economics. We were brought up to see a pile of newspapers in stock from the 1950s, 60 to 70s-80s.

So, we grew up reading. We had no option but to read, and we took pride in

reading, because we always understood that message. We also did well with our classmates in English and Literature, because we had an advantage over them.

### When did you start writing?

I was in JSS 1 when I wrote my first scribble. I call it scribble. It was fashioned after *Eze Goes to School* by Onuora Nzekwu. I read *Eze Goes to School* in my JSS1. It wasn't among the prescribed texts but it was part of the books my father had in his library. So, I was challenged to do something similar to impart knowledge on my siblings and their friends.

When I was in my SS 3, I was preparing for my WAEC exams on Literature in English. To be specific, we had a good teacher at Priscilla Memorial Secondary School, Oguta, called Mazi. Mazi was a very good teacher. He was teaching us Igbo language, but he was conducting extra moral classes for those of us studying and preparing for English Literature.

He made sure that we would memorize verses from Shakespeare and excerpts from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. It was fun to be in Mazi's class. I was transported to another realm. My consciousness for literature grew more. Mazi did that for those of us in SS3 who were preparing for WAEC.

Along the line, I started writing a novel. I discovered I had the talent. Although my father wanted me to be a lawyer, I had a better vision of what I wanted to be. So, Mazi inspired those of us who



**Yamtarawala**  
Henry Akubuiro

loved literature and also inspired me to be a writer.

The first novel I wrote was more than 100 pages, but I lost it along the way. When I entered the university, my love for writing and reading blossomed. We had lecturers who were not only experts in literature but were also writers – people like Professor Isidore Diala, who won the first and second Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism. He taught me. We had people like Chris Onyema, VC Nwulu and Ngozi Umunnakwe who were writers. We were looking up to them.

In my Year One, I challenged myself to replicate what those lectures were doing. We had lecturers who were writing poetry, drama, novels and children's literature. So I told myself I was going to do whatever they were doing themselves, taking a clue from what they did – masterpieces they wrote. What I was doing every year, at the end of every semester, was to ensure that I wrote something, either a novel or a play or poems. When I left the university, I already had four full length novels and four plays and more than 100 poems, which was a feat for a student. There was nobody who came close to that record. I was the only person who achieved that feat in my university, and I won all the prizes, both for poetry, fiction and drama. I won everything in the university. So I started very early as a writer.

I was even thinking that, by the time I graduated from the university, I would have so many published works. It didn't come to pass. Some of the works were lost. Also, I was compelled to sell one full length novel when the publisher couldn't publish it as quickly as I wanted.

After two years on the queue, that novel didn't come to light, so I was compelled to sell it to him and he sold it to a lecturer teaching somewhere in a federal university and he changed the name of the author to his. So it was a loss to me.

When I became a literary journalist, it was too tasking. You read so much and write, so you barely have time for yourself as a writer. It limited me a bit. I was used to promoting other writers. All the big writers you know of in Nigeria, whether it's Wole Soyinka or Achebe, JP Clark or Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Uche Nduka or Nduka Otiono – everybody – whenever you write and publish a book in Nigeria, you must send it to me to review them. So I engaged in this for years, and it limited my own writing. It also helped me, because there's so much inspiration from what they were doing. I didn't want to rush into publishing myself, as some writers do. I was taking my time, biding my time, to perfect my craft to make sure that, once I came out, I would come out with a bang.

### So what would you say writing means to you?

Writing is a way of expressing myself. It's also a way of entertaining people. It's also a way of criticizing society. It's also a way of illuminating untold stories of our civilizations and our cultures.

I grew up reading Chinua Achebe and other great writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who were some of the best writers we have in Africa. Also, I was inspired by my lecturers who were also writers. Above all, I had that inside me.

You know, you can't just be a writer overnight. Some people go to creative writing workshop to learn how to write in bits. If you don't have it inside you, it's difficult. If you look at the greatest writers we have in Africa, be it Chinua Achebe or Cyprian Ekwensi or Elechi Amadi or JP Clark or Ngugi Wa Thiong'o or Nadine Gordimer, they had that thing inside them. Writing is inborn in most parts; you only polish it; it only needs exposure to creative writing workshops or reading to polish it. So, from the beginning, I was immersed in reading and I had that talent inside me. I told you I wrote my first book when I was in Jss1. Nobody forced me to write it. It came from within. The muse was speaking to me and also I wrote another one when I was in SS3. Nobody forced me. I didn't attend any creative

writing workshops. That knowledge, that talent was embedded in me. So, it's a combination of both the talent that was inside of me and also my readings that made me choose the path to be a writer.

Also I wanted to inform the society, I wanted to educate the society, I wanted to enlighten the society, because a writer plays all these roles. That was basically what inspired me to be a writer.

### Tell us about your interest in the Nigeria Prize for Literature, how did you discover it?

Yeah, I've been covering literature and books in the media since 2005 – that is, 18 years now. I became a professional journalist at the point when the prize for literature was evolving. It started in 2004. By the time I joined The Sun in 2005, it was the topic of discussion, and I was in charge of the literary beat in The Sun.

The Nigeria Prize for Literature was the dominant topic of discussion in the literary circle. I was among the people who were also interrogating the process and also reporting the prize. From that moment, I knew it was the biggest prize in Nigeria and also in Africa, one of the biggest prizes in the world. What this prize has done for writers in Nigeria is to make writers compete among themselves to see who's going to emerge the best playwright or the best novelist, the best in

children's literature or the best critic.

Also, because I came from a literary background, I saw the eagerness among writers to enter for this prize – a kind of validation, because before it there was no big prize in Nigeria. We had ANA prizes but NLNG brought something new. It brought a razzmatazz and pumped in money into the prize.

So, it became the most sought-after prize in Nigeria and Africa. I was also a bit intimidated. I took my time, because, at that point in time, we had professors who were winning the prizes. So, if you were not a professor, you would not be inspired to challenge for the prize. So, we waited for the time when the prize would be democratized for those who we were not professors to have a go at the prize.

When we saw younger writers entering and being long-listed, we were inspired to enter. So I had it at the back of my mind that I was going to enter, but I didn't enter immediately. It took me years, because I was also reporting the prize, critiquing writers, reviewing their books and interviewing them. I was taking my time for the right moment.

It is the dream of every writer to compete for this prize, and that informed my step to enter for the prize, too.

**Let's look at your entry, *Yamtatarawala –the Warrior King*, what inspired it?**

I was first challenged by what some of the greatest writers and playwrights from Nigeria, Africa and the world have done with history and culture.

If you look at drama, the greatest playwright of all time in the world is William Shakespeare. His greatest books are all historical plays, whether it is *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*,

like William Shakespeare did. In Nigeria, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which I read as a young man, also influenced me. What Achebe did was to go back to the 19th century to depict an Igbo society grappling with colonization then and Christianity. So Achebe depicted that society. It depicted the historical intercourse between black Africans and Europeans. It happened in the late 19th century, but he wrote the book in the 20th century.

readers.

Also, in drama – in Nigerian drama – some of our greatest playwrights have also thrived on historical plays. I mentioned a writer like JP Clark who wrote the *Ozidi Saga* – a legend. Also we talk about Ola Rotimi, who wrote *Ovoranmwun Nogbaisi*, which depicted the coming of Europeans to the Benin Empire and how the British defeated Benin and enslaved Ovoranmwun and carted our treasury, too. We are still in the process of recovering what they carted away from the Benin Empire.

My first encounter with that history was when I read Ola Rotimi's play. Ola Rotimi has done something brilliant and fantastic using history and culture in that play. Also, Ahmed Yerima has done something fantastic with historical drama. He wrote about Attahiru, who was the Sultan of Sokoto in the 19th century who had issues with colonial masters, in the play, *Attahiru*. He depicted that setting and encounter, and it became a massive hit. Historical drama has always been a leading light in literature. And then, when I came across the story of Yamtarawala, I first saw it in a book written by Dr. Bukar Usman, who is the President of Nigerian Folklore Society. He's from Biu in Borno State. He wrote *A History of Biu*. When I read that book, I was fascinated, because he wrote a history that I wasn't familiar with.



When you bring something different, it always excites whoever is reading the book or whosoever is watching the life performance.

I deliberately wrote a play that will keep the audience spellbound. The storyline also is unique. It has never been told before in Nigeria literature, so the judges, I believe, must have been swayed by the storyline.

*Antonio and Cleopatra* or *Julius Caesar*, are all historical plays. What Shakespeare did was to go back in time. He went back in time to the 11th century to discover the Europeans, whether the Roman Empire, England or Scotland he came from, to write about those civilizations and how they impacted the societies of his time. So, I was challenged by what a great writer

That book has gone on to become the most widely read book written by an African, the most translated book by an African, and one of the most recommended books not only in universities across the world. So, it is a major feat, because readers are reading about a society that they didn't experience. It seemed so strange. That's what a historical work does to the



I knew about the Kanuri to an extent, but he went back in time to trace the foundation of Kanem-Bornu Empire up to the 16th century, when Yamtarawala, who was Abdullahi, was a prince in Kanem-Bornu, now decided to abandoned Kanem-Bornu in search of his own empire over a crisis.

That history has not been told in literature. Also, I was fascinated by the culture of the Bura people that Buka Usman depicted in *A History of Biu* – an uncommon culture we are not used to – those of us from the southern part of Nigeria. We are not used to reading about that culture and history.

Like everybody who has come across my book, always says to me, “I’ve never heard about Yamtarawala.” Even Professor Femi Osofusan, who is today the greatest playwright we have in Nigeria, placed a call to me, when he saw my name on the shortlist. He said, “Henry, you have done something fantastic. I’ve never heard about Yamtarawala. I’ve never heard about Biu people.”

So many people have expressed that sentiment, so that means I’m also doing something extraordinary. For me to be educating professors about a certain civilization, something about that culture, means that it’s shrouded in mystery; and it’s the duty of a writer to illuminate those stories, whether it has to

do with you or not. That story doesn’t only affect Nigeria: it’s a story set in the North East, but it has reverberations in the entire Africa and the Middle East, because Kanem-Bornu was about one of the biggest empires in what is today Nigeria and one of the biggest empires in Africa. You’re talking about the contemporary of the Songhai Empire, Mali Empire, the Ghana Empire, the Benin Empire, Oyo Empire. Kanem was bigger than all these empires, because Kanem was made up of Northeast Nigeria, Northern Cameroon and Southern Libya. It also included almost the entire Chad and parts of Niger. It was bigger than the Benin Empire and the Oyo Empire. But history and literature have not done justice to that story compared to what they have done with the Benin Empire.

So, when I saw that story, I said, “This is something to explore. Let us illuminate this story to those who are not aware of it –that Kanem was one of the greatest empires and it had so many affiliations, in North Africa and also with the Middle East. And the slavery that we also depict in Nigerian literature is basically Trans-Atlantic slavery, with Europeans coming to Africa to enslave Africans to Americas and the West Indies. But there was also an aspect of slavery that was taking place at the same time. People were going to Arabia –nobody is writing about that in our

literature. So, if you read my book, it’s also reflected. It’s an untold story. It’s a reality that exists that nobody’s paying attention to. I also wanted to bring into perspective the North Eastern dramatic aesthetics and their culture. We need to also celebrate that culture. I don’t have any relationship with them– my mother, father, and friends are not from there. But I saw that story. I saw that there was a vacuum in our literature that had to be filled. So, I exploited it. And I’m happy people are reacting to it, because they have never heard about it, even those who have heard about it, they have not paid attention to it clearly as they are doing right now with what I have done with *Yamatarawala –the Warrior King*.

**Are the characters in the book real? How did you strike a balance between facts and fiction?**

Most of them are real life characters, especially Yamtarawala himself. He existed and also Queen Asga is a real life character, because I’m dealing with a historical play. You also have to bring the history of individuals who defined that era into play.

So, people like Queen Asga, the mother of Yamtarawala, existed in real life. She was a slave girl in Yemen who was put up for sale. The son of the king of Yemen saw her and purchased her. But when he got to the palace, the father took a liking to Asga and married her.

Queen Asgar didn’t stay there long, because Egypt fought with Yemen and defeated Yemen and killed the king of Yemen.

So, while Queen Asga was wandering in the bush, she was captured by the slave raiders from Kanem-Bornu. So we can see how powerful Kanem was –all the way from Ngazargamu, its capital in today’s North East Nigeria; they went all the way to Yemen. This account has not been portrayed in our literature. I was trying to depict real life characters like Asga and Umar. He’s also a real life character and some of the people that Yamtarawala met in the course of his journeys, the record of his conquest to the Biu area, also featured real life characters. So, I mixed both –real characters and fictitious characters. So, the book is a mixture of reality and fiction. You have to make a balance, because if you make it only factual, it becomes a work of history, which is not literature. So, it’s a mixture of both. You have to bring excitement to the play by also inventing characters that would make it more exciting and interesting. I relied on the historical accounts of what went down in the 16th century, written and documented by Dr. Bukar Usman. What I did was to read every line of what Bukar Usman wrote in *A History of Biu*. It wasn’t as if he wrote much about Yamtarawala in *A History of Biu*. There was an aspect of it in what, say,

about ten-fifteen pages on Yamtarawala. But he did so much on Biu culture, history, tradition, foods, which I exploited. I picked from here and there and, also, I travelled to the place, Biu, itself to see things for myself.

When I went to Biu, I visited the place Yamtarawala used to go for hunting more than 500 years ago, it is called Viukuthla, and that place is also where all the kings of Biu have been buried. If you go there, you will see all the kings that have ruled that emirate since after Yamtarawala days, except Yamtarawala who was buried somewhere else. Other kings were buried at Viukuthla. That site is unique and UNESCO has to pay attention to it. Its contemporary in Egypt has been documented by UNESCO and is visited by tourists. The place is lying in waste. It is supposed to be a tourist attraction in Nigeria.

I'm an igbo writing about a culture I've never lived in or never experienced before. So I travelled to see things for myself. I saw how the landscape was, the rivers, the mountains, the valleys and also how the people looked like, how they talked and their culture. I went to the marketplace. I went to different local governments. You know, many people are saying that I took such a great risk going to Borno State, because people hardly go to Borno.

The first time I went there was in 2016. That was a time Boko Haram was still controlling several local governments. They were killing. When I was going to Biu for the first time in 2016, I passed a school between Gombe State and Borno State border where Boko Haram had invaded. So, it was a scary experience for me, but it was worth it. I knew I had something I wanted to write, both for journalism and also for creative writing. So, I went there.

I went to the emir's palace, he welcomed me, and showed me around his palace. I also took note of how the palace looked, because I knew I needed such in my settings. I also interacted with custodians of culture. I went to a place called Marama in Borno State, which is regarded as the centre of Burra culture. Biu is an emirate and also a town. The Biu people are called the Bura-Babur. The language they speak is also Burra-Babur. They can be found in Adamawa state, they are in Bauchi State, Gombe State and also in Borno state, and in Yobe State.

I visited the major local government in the Biu Emirate to see how the place looked, to see how the people dressed, how they talked, what kind of food they ate, what kind of weapons were they using in those days.

I visited those who told me the art of traditional war-

fare, what kind of weapons they were using. I added these things to the story, because you cannot write a historical story without those bits. Historical stories are basically research, but, then, if you are coming from a different environment, there's always a need for you to go visit the place, not just the Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* set in Africa with many distortions, which made Chinua Achebe to respond with *Things Fall Apart*, because Achebe felt it was a distortion of history depicted by Joseph Conrad. I didn't want to make that mistake like Conrad writing about Africa as a stranger without knowing what was in Africa proper. I had to go to Biu with all the risks involved to capture that society and also visit some historical sites that really existed during the Yamtarawala days.

### Generally, what do you think sets your work apart?

What I believe sets the work apart are in different layers, not just the storyline but also the performatory aspect of it, because I've been covering life theatre as a journalist for more than 17 years. Wherever a performance is going on stage the biggest stage I'm always among the first to be invited to cover and critique it. I have learned so much on stage apart from studying English and Literary studies and being a student of

drama. I've learned practically from the stage. So, I brought these performatory aspects of life theatre into Yamtarawala..., and I wasn't surprised when the judges said that "this play is not only good for the stage, but also for the screen."

It comes from experience. I wanted to write a play that would reverberate on stage, bringing all the elements I have learnt over the years. I've been to many cinema halls. Again, I have watched stage performances where, after 10-20 minutes, people were walking out.

I realized that these playwrights had good stories, but they didn't realize it well on stage. A play has to be realized well on stage. It's both the duty of the playwright and the stage director to provide tips to make it happen from the script to the stage. You have to detain the imagination of the audience to continue watching the stage play. A play is not like a novel or a poem where you write it and then allow whoever is reading to take this or that away. For a stage play, you must detain the imagination of the audience. You must keep them rooted to the spot. So, I brought into the performance a spectacular culture that we are not used to seeing. When I mention the Bansuwe dance, Wari Wari dance and the Waksha Waksha dances, they say:

‘What are all this?’ So, I know I brought something different to the theatre. When you bring something different, it always excites whoever is reading the book or whosoever is watching the life performance. I deliberately wrote a play that will keep the audience spellbound. The storyline also is unique. It has never been told before in Nigeria literature, so the judges, I believe, must have been swayed by the storyline.

As I told you, one of the greatest playwrights we have in Nigeria, Prof. Femi Osofisan, put a call across to me, he said, ‘Henry, you are really educating me. I’ve never heard about this before. I’ve never heard about this culture.’ If a scholar like Prof. Osofisan, who is considered one of the greatest playwrights in Africa, is saying that, it means I have done something extraordinary; I have captured the imagination of those who never knew such a thing existed. That is the novelty of the storyline and the performatory aspect of it I have brought to the theatre, I believe, wowed the judges. Also, the CEO of National Theatre of Nigeria, Prof Sunnie Ododo, who was among the people I gave the script to initially read when I wrote it, when he saw it, he bought into the play, and said, ‘This is novel’. He, himself hadn’t heard about the culture and the history I was depicting. He was surprised. He told me straight away,

“We are going to organize a command-performance for this play at the National Theatre. Also, those from the National Troupe of Nigeria, who are the drama ambassadors of Nigeria, on seeing the script were fascinated. They said, “This kind of culture and history is the kind of thing we love acting.”

So you can see that the play is exciting everybody. It is like I’m playing the role of an archaeologist going into a society to dig into the past, to bring

**How did you feel when you were shortlisted?**

I felt on top of the world when the news was broken to me. I’ve always known Nigeria as the ‘giant of literature’ in Africa. Everybody in Africa is looking up to what Nigerian writers are doing, and the Nigeria Prize has come to stay. It has become the poster boy of literary prizes in Africa. When I made the longlist and went on to make the shortlist, I felt fulfilled. I knew I must have done

done something extraordinary. So, I felt fulfilled. I was excited. And so many people who called me to congratulate me told me, “Henry, you deserve to be here, because we have always known your talent in literary journalism and we also know your talent as a writer.”

This recognition is coming at the right time. When you have done so much for writing in Nigeria and Africa, not just for journalism, but also writing. So many people believed I deserve to be there, and I also knew that I had made an extraordinary effort to be there. So, it didn’t come totally as a surprise to me.

**What if you don’t win this prize?**

(Laughs). The essence of writing is not to win awards, but to put a story forward that will excite readers and also aspire to enter the literary canon. Great writers like Chinua Achebe didn’t win the Nobel Prize in Literature, but his books are one of the most sought-after in the world.

Wherever African literature is discussed or world literature is mentioned, you must mention Chinua Achebe, yet he didn’t win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The dream of every writer is to enter the literary canon, where your work will be celebrated and read by many across the world. That is ultimately what I’m aspiring to So, if



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something that people are not aware of. So that curiosity to know about this history, that curiosity to watch this culture, that curiosity to know about the dances of this people, which I incorporated in the play, I think, made the difference in this play.

something different, something extraordinary, because not everybody gets the opportunity to get this far.

We have so many talented writers scattered all over Nigeria. So, for you to emerge one of the top three means you have



the prize comes my way, I will feel on top of the world.

But I think I deserve it based on the feedback I've been getting from everybody, both in Nigeria and Africa.

But if it doesn't come my way, I will also congratulate the winner. It's not a do-or-die thing. Having said that, I have learned to be optimistic whenever I do something extraordinary, like I have done in Yamtarawala, the Warrior King.

**How has NLNG contributed to the development of Nigerian literature? What can it do to improve the prize?**

NLNG has done so much for the promotion of literature in Africa with the Nigeria Prize for Literature. It's not all the time that a writer gets the chance to earn \$100,000. There are very few literary prizes in the world comparable to what NLNG is giving to Nigeria writers –what NLNG is giving in celebration of literary excellence. It has done fantastically well in this regard.

The only thing I think the organizers should do now is to also purchase the books of writers on the longlist, because writers have been complaining that for you to get to the longlist in a literary contest such as this, it means you have done something brilliant. So, it would be wise if NLNG could purchase hundreds or thousands of copies of the longlisted writers and donate them to schools and institutions. It is also a way of encouraging writing. A situation where the winner wins and takes all is a kind of disservice to all the writers who

have come this far. So, buying their works is a kind of encouragement to them. Distributing them is also an encouragement to other writers - a way of saying, "there is hope for me as a writer, even if I didn't win this prize." So, in that aspect, NLNG has to do something by purchasing thousands of copies of the writers and circulating them so that more people will read them, because people say Nigerians don't read. It's not as if they don't read; people don't read because they don't have the money to buy the books. The purchasing power is low. But, if you give them free, they will read. If you subsidize and reduce the costs, they will buy. The Nigeria economy is on a downward spiral. The exchange rate of the dollar has affected the purchasing power of most Nigerians. So if an organization like NLNG can subsidise the cost of books by making them available to not only the readers, libraries and schools, more people will get the chance to read the books.

NLNG has done fantastically well. Even if they don't do this, so many people will still praise them, but I believe they can score another point by incorporating this thing I have mentioned just right now.



## An interview with

# Abideen Abolaji Ojomu

### Please introduce yourself and tell us briefly about your early life.

My full name is Abideen Abolaji Ojomu. I graduated from the university as a Chemical Engineer in the year 2000. I went on to work for quite a number of companies before I decided to go into writing full-time. I've written a total of three books - *The Oiled Wheels*, *The Woes of Warriors* and very recently, *The Ojuelegba Crossroads*.

### Let's talk about your journey into the world of literature. How did it all begin?

I really fell in love with art when I read the single most important book, I would say, for my journey into art. It was a book written by Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*. I read *The Fountainhead* sometime in 1993. The creative composition of that book was so important to me that it made me believe that I have nothing stopping me from achieving anything.

And of course, the theme of the book was to empower people to be able to think independently and believe in themselves, and what they can achieve. So, I thought I would like to write a book too, given the brilliance of the *The Fountainhead*.

### What does writing mean to you?

Writing is a very good opportunity for me to always find hope in places that are almost hopeless. It gives me an opportunity to envision a different reality from the one I'm having to relate to and be able to create something. Something fictional that represents what I feel is

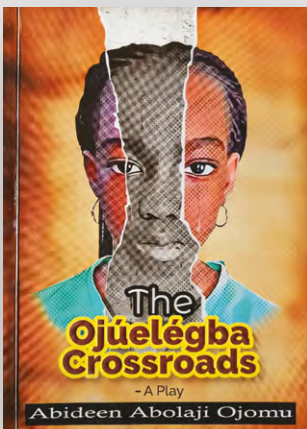
very ideal. And that itself gives hope. If you can see a very different future, a very different narrative from the one you are currently living, it gives you an opportunity to look forward to something and to work towards something. That's what art has done for me. It allowed me to always aim for something better than I currently have.

### What inspired you to become an author/playwright?

I became an author because I love reading and you know that reading empowers imagination. Around the year 1998, I saw a play. I saw it play twice. I saw it being staged by two different theatre companies and the delivery of the same script was different. The emotion that I got from watching the two different plays played out differently. I understand theatre to be a means of creating emotions that are very diverse, you know, looking at the same plays by two different playhouses, giving two very different emotions.

I believe in art from that point of view, for its ability to evoke very diverse emotions given the situation. I thought I would like to more specifically focus on theatre because I can give people the opportunity to envision realities and to evoke emotion that they see in plays based on the delivery.

I try to look at theatre as a fundamental aspect of writing with colourations that can create very different emotions. So, I thought I would be able to unleash that power of art, to deliver my project to people so that they can come off watching my art based on their own emotions and their own lived experiences.



**The Ojuelegba Crossroads**  
Abideen Abolaji Ojomu

**What motivated you to apply for the Nigeria Prize for Literature, and how did you know about it?**

I think the first time I had anything to learn about NLNG was in the year 2004. I was working in Abeokuta, and I saw a newspaper that was asking for people to submit their plays. I'd written two sketches of plays at that point, but I thought they were not mature enough to be a part of the Nigeria Prize for Literature, because it's the highest excellence of literary achievement anybody can aspire for in Nigeria. So right from 2004 till very recently when I submitted, I tried to develop my art as a writer. I tried to learn more so that the content of my work can come out really, good. Between 2004, when I knew about it till now, I know a lot of people have won the award. I'm really impressed about how much people are submitting to this award.

**Let's delve into your entry play for the prize, *The Ojuelegba Crossroads*. Could you provide a brief overview of the play?**

*Ojuelegba Crossroads* is a political manifesto that empowers people to think of a different narrative and to think of change, to be able to articulate the steps to achieving the change and to go after the steps, whatever it takes them.

**Why the title, *The Ojuelegba Crossroads*?**

Ojuelegba as a crossroad... Ojuelegba is a crossroad in Lagos. It's notorious for traffic because often, the traffic lights are not working. And every once in a while, when they are working, even the drivers don't obey the traffic lights. You know, imagine a very high-traffic area that is a crossroad, a lot of vehicular movement and the traffic light is not working, or the drivers are not respecting the traffic instructions. It's a recipe for chaos. I used the title *Ojuelegba Crossroad* because it represents the state we are in as a nation at this point. It talks about the fact that if the traffic light is to represent our politics, our politics is either not working, or when it is working, people don't even feel the need to believe in it because it's not been able to deliver anything in the past.

Another reason why I chose *Ojuelegba Crossroad* is that it's a crossroad that has a lot of diversity: people from every culture, and from every ward are present at *Ojuelegba Crossroad*. I try to see how we can harness the diversity to be able to create a stronger nation that can deliver on the expectation of the individuals and every citizenry.

To sum it up, the name Ojuelegba comes from Ojubo Elegba. Oju Elegba means the shrine of the Elegba masquerade. In African mythology, the masquerades represent the ancestors. I chose that place to be able to use as symbolism, as the ancestors are at a crossroads looking at us and

they are trying to see how we are going to deliver on the expectation of building a great nation.

**What motivated your choice of characters?**

The most important motivation for my choice of characters is the present state of the nation and the issue the book itself is trying to address. The present state of the nation is the one whereby there are a lot more people who are struggling to meet their daily obligations, who are struggling to find food, shelter... There are a lot of children who are not having the opportunity to find the right education. So, these different crops of people aspiring for different things, which represent the current state of the nation, all came together to be able to re-evaluate the situation and ask themselves, how do we move ahead? One of the most important characters is Senator Gbewiri who happens to be a political figure. He was a very important person in that play because he represents the failure of Nigerian politics to deliver on the expectations of the people. The most important thing about the socio-political illusion at the crossroads is the belief that the expectations of the people are not as important as the need for power.

We are still in a political situation where it is far more important from the perspective of the politician to hold on to power than to deliver on the expectations

of the people who choose them to lead. There is no accountability after they've gotten into the office, and there is no way of measuring the achievement they committed to before the commitment they gave - the manifesto they shared.

The socio-political illusion in the book tries to espouse the relevance of meeting the aspiration of the people, rather than focusing on power. The Nigerian political situation focuses on gaining power. The political parties are actually very interested in becoming more powerful than delivering on the expectations of the people. This kind of leaves the people out of the equation. The people who elected them to be in power and not getting the benefits. The people are not having their aspirations met while political figures are able to amass power and wealth at the expense of the general public.

**Can you share some insights into the creative process behind *The Ojuelegba Crossroads*?**

The creative process of the *Ojuelegba Crossroad* is a 23-year-long process. It started right about the time I was leaving the university. That was when the book was conceived. It was just conceived as a book to confront the current narrative of franchisement for the average person. It also tried to look at the current situation of black people the world over and how to change the narrative in a way that



nobody's viewed it.

The creative process was very long. I had to be involved in a lot of research. I had a couple of focused interactions with people. I have a lot of questionnaires. There are a lot of books I needed to go through to be able to understand the current narrative, to be able to understand the situation that led to the creation of that narrative and to be able to articulate it. It was deep and engaging because you are trying to answer questions that a lot of people have not articulated. So, it means that I spent a very long time trying to get those answers. Since most of the answers were not even available in the books I was reading, I had to consult people, check their lived experiences, check what experiences of their parents are, what are the things you see about them that you don't like, what you think led to those situations they found themselves. I was able to synthesize and get answers by engaging with people and understanding how their lived experience can be a part of the book, such that, we can create a better world for everybody.

### Were there any particularly challenging moments?

So, the most challenging moment was a writer's challenge. A writer's challenge is being able to create books that are not too aggressive to the current social or socio-political cultural system. A very important question

I needed to address was the impact of religion on the development of my country.

My country is very passionate about religion. It's a subject that everybody is not willing to engage with, but it is part of the problems of our development as a nation. So, I was trying to cross that line while able to communicate the limit we should not exceed in terms of the trust we put into the religious leaders who rep-

Since the book was a product of research, it was what people talked about. I had to separate myself from the creative process and just report on all the findings of the research. I think the arrival of the Europeans in Africa was a very important part of the development of the world as we know it. But there are other challenges that the arrival of Europeans brought to Africa and by far the most important of them, is the destruction of African

the arrival of Europeans, was destroyed. The idea of doing that, is that when people's cultures are destroyed and they do not have any connection with their past, it is very easy to mould them into a different kind of people that can serve the interest of the people who in this case, colonized them. When you don't have any connection with your roots, there's no basis for you to investigate your history and imagine what your own ancestors would have done in that situation. So, I find that to be very central in the development of the book as the creative process; how much of what we truly have has been taken away? How much of it has been destroyed? How much of it has been changed to something else? Such that we are a totally different set of people from our ancestors. So, I think that is by far the most important narrative we need to engage as Africans. When we look at it in the context of the European occupation of our countries in the years past.



Another reason why I chose *Ojuelegba Crossroad* is that it's a crossroad that has a lot of diversity: people from every culture, and from every ward are present at *Ojuelegba Crossroad*. I try to see how we can harness the diversity to be able to create a stronger nation that can deliver on the expectation of the individuals and every citizenry.

resent us, who more often than not, are actually going after their own interest and the need for us to be able to understand when their actions are not in our best interest individually or in our best interest as a nation. It was difficult to deal with that aspect of confronting or challenging what people believe to be the most important part of their humanity, their religion and their political ideology.

culture and civilization.

**A powerful excerpt from the character Tunde reads, "The truth is a small pebble dropped in a vast ocean of historical lies. Unless we present our own history, we will have to contend with the lies of foreign historians." Can you shed some light on this?**

African culture, following

That was based on the belief that there are narratives that said that before colonialism, Africans had no history. That as a people, we are without any form of cultural or historical narrative that the outside world could engage with. That created a situation whereby during the advent of colonialism, our colonial masters and all other Europeans started writing stories for us based on what they expected us to be. Not exactly what we are, not ex-

actly our true history. These histories and narratives are very prevalent now. It's a situation whereby people everywhere from the world are looking at Africa, based on the interactions with the narratives about Africa that was created by non-Africans. These narratives that were created, were out of context.

I was just trying to confront and perhaps engage that narrative that before colonialism, Africans had no history, and Africa was a place of savagery. That we are just undergrounders and savage people. This was not true. These narratives, even though they are being refined a little bit, to say that we are people that are less developed technologically, culturally and socially, is still very prevalent in texts.

**What did you intend to achieve with this renewed narrative?**

So, a lot of people are coming to Africa, they are looking at Africa from the context of all these narratives that were false, and I will say, we Africans, we partook in this problem against us because we are not writing our stories as often as we should write it. We are not ensuring that our very beautiful historical documents are available in every part of the world so that they confront the wrong narratives of us that were written by non-Africans.

I believe we Africans, need to start out a project whereby we ensure that we correct the wrong notion about us that has been entrenched in people's reality. So that when an African interacts with a non-African, the non-African can establish the level of the African's intelligence and social awareness. They kind of view African's as outliers, because their understanding of our culture is that the people are uncultured and still living with the ideology of savagery.

We need to re-educate them to understand the power of our minds, the power of our ancestors, our ability to do great things, and the history of greatness we have been able to deliver to the world which is not available for them to know. We really need to do this in the interest of our children so that they will not have to start out their lives with these stereotypes we have had to deal with right up to this point.

**The book was described as a book of metaphor, why did you choose to write in metaphor and not in clear simple terms?**

Metaphors are powerful linguistic tools that solicit different meanings from the same expression. It empowers the speaker to leave more unsaid and solicit the listeners to find their own meaning metaphor allows everyone to actively partake in the dialogue so that very useful meanings are creat-

ed. Writing in metaphor is a very difficult method of writing because it demands a lot of critical thinking on the part of the writer as he looks for expression and language that invites different meanings and interpretations. Every word, every expression, every sentence, and every silence were carefully chosen so that they left meaning at the discretion of the audience. Metaphors invite the audience to partake in the dialogue until they too become creators of art as they unravel the metaphor. It is my intention that audiences also become artists as they go through my work. There are still a lot of hidden meanings in the book that most critics have not found, I believe time will unveil all the gems hidden in the book.

**The Ojuelegba Crossroads has received significant attention as one of the shortlisted works for the Nigeria Prize for Literature. What do you believe sets this play apart and caught the organizers' attention?**

It's a very high entry into a career for me. It's a high point for me because my first submission to the NLNG, coming this far and getting all these accolades and tractions, and good feedback from critics tells me that what I'm engaging is of great important to everyone and that my artistic delivery is awesome. One, it's a problem that everybody would like to engage in and that

everybody's paths are not properly articulated. I've been able to articulate it and put it in a book and get this level of attention from everybody and most importantly, NLNG. It is wonderful...is a big high for me in terms of my literary journey. It tells me that if the first job is this good, it can only get better. Nothing lower than this is going to come out of me. It kind of puts me in the forefront of literary development in Nigeria that 'now you can't go lower.' Now, you've got this attention, you need to strive for more excellence. Now, you need to focus more on your subject matter and now, you need to put in all the work required to do an excellent job.

What I believe to be one of the reasons why the book comes out this good, which sets it apart from others is its focus on the most relevant concern of the country, which is the need to change the narrative of our country, the need to develop ourselves and the need to take our country to the next level of greatness. The process of engaging it is to look at it from the perspective of people who are most affected by a country that's having issues: the man on the street who cannot afford to feed himself, who cannot afford to educate his children, who cannot afford to find a house. I was just telling the story of ordinary people, and I happened to be one of them.

I was telling the story of

the trouble an ordinary person must go through to be able to live through a day. Focusing on that brings literature to its most important requirement, which is, documenting the story of ordinary people as they go through their life.

I think that is a very important theme that the book was able to convey, and I believe it is one of the reasons that sets it apart. For the most part, while the book looked at the fact that we have corrupt politicians in power, often, there are other foreign interventions that might be responsible for the problems in Nigeria. There are other foreign instructions that force them to behave in certain ways that we find not to be in the interest of the people. So, I was just trying to engage with the local and the international aspect of all the problems, ordinary people must engage with every day. And yeah, I think that was very interesting.

**Being one of the final three playwrights shortlisted for the Nigeria Prize for Literature, how do you feel about this achievement after a rigorous selection process involving over 100 other playwrights?**

I'd like to say a big thank you to NLNG, and the reason for that is that submitting a book for a prize is the smallest part of what it takes to win a prize. The rigorous work is, in going through every single document submitted to give

every single submission a fair chance.

That is perhaps the most difficult work, and it involves a high level of engagement in terms of getting the right people, getting the right selection criteria and the like. NLNG, working through all those difficult parts of the prize to come up with three of us, is a very difficult thing to have done and I think they need to be given all the necessary accolades for

one of the most important qualities of our ancestors, which is attention to details.

Everything they did during their time was focused on doing the right thing, focusing on the right requirement to achieving the right things, and eventually delivering on doing what is right. I think they have done the right thing by getting all the resources required to do a good job, and they have done a good job of finding the right books

work will be alive right into the future. Whether the people who select at this point, choose the best work or they do not choose the best work; literature itself will choose the best work. History itself will choose the best work. So, I'd be very glad, and I'm sure that's what they are going to do. The Nigeria prize is going to choose the best work possible as the winner, and if it happens to be any of the other two participants, I'd stand up, clap for them and celebrate them for creating great art for our country.

**What exciting projects should Nigerians and other readers of African literature worldwide expect from you?**

Okay, this is one of the reasons why the *Ojuelegba Crossroad* took 23 years to write. It was part of a long conversation and starting it, ultimately opened all the other doors and we don't have a choice but to walk through it. One of the most important projects that I'm going to be focusing on from this point going forward is, how we can create opportunities for young Nigerians in an ever-changing world.

We have one of the largest youth populations in the world. How do we intend to engage that population for national and global development? We have some of the smartest people in the world who have been able to prove themselves everywhere they have gone. How



It's a very high entry into a career for me. It's a high point for me because my first submission to the NLNG, coming this far and getting all these accolades and tractions, and good feedback from critics tells me that what I'm engaging is of great important to everyone and that my artistic delivery is awesome. One, it's a problem that everybody would like to engage in and that everybody's paths are not properly articulated.

bringing resources together to achieve that, because it takes a lot to find a needle from a haystack.

You really, really need to dig in and look for it. You need to go through every strand of hay because it could be hiding in the hay. So, going through that is very important. They did, and it made me feel that we still retained

for the final three.

**If the Nigeria Prize for Literature were to be announced, how would you react if one of the other two shortlisted won?**

I'd be very impressed and the reason I'm going to be really impressed is, that literature should be focused on what is best. The best



can we harness the skills of the diverse people in the diaspora to be able to rechannel growth back to Africa so that more people, even if they are not living in Africa, will be able to take advantage of all these skills, resources and developmental initiatives that have been built by people who are currently living in the diaspora?

How do they engage with the current narrative so that we create a nation that creates opportunity for the people? That's my next project. Top on that list is, educating the children. Second, is engaging with stakeholders on developmental initiatives that can translate to social good.

**Looking ahead, how do you think winning this prestigious prize would affect your future works and contributions to the world of literature?**

Winning the Nigeria Prize for Literature is going to provide me with the opportunity to become a full-time writer. Currently, I'm two-timing between being a writer and getting a second job. At this point, winning the prize provide me with the resources to commit full time to creating great literature for my people, researching the most relevant social concerns and being able to use art as a way of proposing solutions to them so that sometime in the future,

I'll be compared with one of the greatest writers of African origin; people like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. That's what I'm going for. I want to be as great as the people who taught me to write, and winning this prize shows me the way to go and opens the first door for me to walk through.

What I find to be the most important thing that Africans and people in the diaspora need to focus on at this point is, creating an initiative whereby every one of us in the diaspora can come together and bring all of these skills we have been able to get from across the world together, to address social issues in our country; to be able to come up with a system that partners with critical stakeholders in our various countries and see how we can translate some of the greatness we have found, some of the things we have learned, some of the products of our project, and engagement with other parts of the world, to create a new set of values that can impact people's lives positively. I think that's very important for us to do. Without doing that, I think we are undermining ourselves for the skills we have acquired and the opportunity to create great things, I think.

**Thank you very much..**



What I believe to be one of the reasons why the book comes out this good, which sets it apart from others is its focus on the most relevant concern of the country, which is the need to change the narrative of our country, the need to develop ourselves and the need to take our country to the next level of greatness.

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An interview with

# Obari Gomba

**Please introduce yourself and tell us briefly about your early life.**

My name is Obari Gomba. I am a poet and playwright. I teach Literature and Creative Writing at the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt. I am from Rivers State, Eleme Local Government Area precisely. I have been on this earth for over 46 years. I grew up in a village – Alesa Eleme.

I am familiar with the basic occupations of my people: farming and fishing. That is how I grew up in my homeland where I attended State School Alesa and Ascension High School. I have a first degree in English from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and MA and PhD from the University of Port Harcourt.

I have an elder brother and two sisters. So, we are four from my mother. I also have three brothers from my late stepmother.

**Let's talk about your journey into the world of literature. How did it all begin?**

For people who grew from traditional societies like mine, our first encounter with stories would be in the family. My father was a storyteller. I remember that at night, after we had returned from the farm and other places, we would gather to just basically share stories. I found my father's storytelling very intriguing, and I do not think I am as good as he was. My mother told stories occasionally to fill the gap when my father was not at home. I believe I belong possibly to the last generation of children to enjoy

folktales at home in the manner of tales by moonlight.

Storytelling was also part of the culture of my primary school. Whether we read stories from texts or listened to stories told by our teachers in the classroom, stories enriched us. From those formative years, I got to understand that stories are important. Narratives are important. Poems are important. Dramatization or mimicry of life is important to a child. That was the background to the junior secondary school where I read exciting texts like Cyprian Ekwensi's *The Passport of Malam Ilia* and *An African Night's Entertainment*.

My first attempt to start creating literature or writing works of my own was in 1992. I was in senior secondary school then. I started reading some of the recommended texts in the syllabus. Literature started appealing to me in a different kind of way. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was one of the texts that I read. Gradually, I just started reading entirely out of the syllabus and enjoying the wonders of literature.

It struck me that I could create literature too. I found a few friends who had the same feeling. We started trying to write poems, stories and plays. Some of which we pray that nobody should see today. That is how we started. By the time I got to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, I had already made up my mind to take writing seriously.

Nsukka was important to my development. Somehow, before I got to Nsukka, I had made an appearance on radio as a guest poet. But, of everything that I wrote before I got into the university, I



**Grit**  
Obari Gomba

can only say that one poem or two have survived. After graduation, I burnt my early writings because I did not want people to see them. I felt I had come to another level of creativity. The few works that I wrote at the university survived. Over the years, I have made effort to deepen my craft and improve the quality of my writing.

### What does writing mean to you?

I can tell you frankly that if I continue to write for the next 10 to 20 years, I believe I will produce better works than what I am producing today. I will keep challenging myself to create works that are better. That implies that writing means a lot to me.

If I am permitted to put things on a scale, I will say: God, family, and literature. But all three are interwoven. In the way I have carried myself, I have not seen any difference between how I live my life as a literary person and as a family person and as a religious person. They are all interwoven in one being in the day-to-day activities that I participate in and in the way I relate with people. If you ask me straight on, 'what do you do for a living?' What will come to me naturally is that I write, okay? It does not pay the bills, but that is how I define myself, principally as a writer.

### What inspired you to become an author/playwright?

I recall that as a senior secondary school student, we were encouraged to be creative, and I started looking for a few things that I wanted to do. I could have been a visual artist or a singer, or any other kind of creative person, but I chose writing, and I was not very intentional about it at the time.

With time, I became deliberate with the creative process. I wrote stories, poems and short plays. I do not believe that they were fantastic. They were things that a young person of my age and training would create at that point. I believe that they are very important stepping stones to what I now write. I tell people all the time that if I had not written those ugly works when I wrote them, I would not have been able to write what I am writing now.

Today, I am contributing to the Nigerian canon. I am producing and teaching culture. The immensity of what I am doing may not be obvious now, but I think that (with the passage of time) people will see that I have made my own fair contribution to the Nigerian literary tradition.

I was 19 when I made my first public appearance on radio as a writer. There was a program called Letters of Gold on Radio Rivers FM. After that, I went to Nsukka. For every year that I was at Nsukka, I wrote poems, I wrote a few stories, I wrote and staged my plays, and I won prizes in the three

genres. Writing was something that I took seriously. Apart from just building my competence as someone who consumed literature, who appreciated literature, who wrote critical comments about literature, I was very deliberate about being someone who produced literature.

For me, therefore, creative writing and critical writing go together. I teach literature at university level for a living. I guess my training as a literary person was such that I was able to define very clearly from the beginning. I knew that being a critic was not something I could escape because the daily routine of the classroom required that I read literary texts and made commentary about them. Even the culture of the exams in the English Studies program required that I should read literary texts and make commentary about them.

### What motivated you to apply for the Nigeria Prize for Literature, and how did you know about it?

The Nigeria Prize for Literature is known by all. I have followed its success from inception, even though I only competed for the first time in 2013. I love competing for prizes if I perceive that my work will make a strong entry. In 2018, when I wrote *Guerrilla Post* and it made the list of 11 for the Nigeria Prize for Literature, I also competed and won the Association of Nigerian Authors Drama Prize. People asked "Is Obari Gomba

also a playwright?" They did not know that the first literary prize I won at the University of Nigeria was for playwrighting. In fact, I won more significant prizes for drama at the University of Nigeria than I won for poetry. But, when I left the university, I focused a great deal on poetry.

Now, I have published *Grit*, my seventh full-length play. The language is elevated. In the hands of a gifted writer, language must be elevated. Language is the life of literature. I am glad it has made the shortlist of three.

The first time I was listed for the prize was in 2013. Well, now they use the terms longlist and shortlist. When the prize started, the terms were initial shortlist of 11 and a final shortlist of three. So, in 2013, *Length of Eyes* made the initial shortlist of 11. In 2017, *For Every Homeland* made the initial shortlist of 11. In 2018, *Guerrilla Post* made the initial shortlist of 11. Within five years, I was on that list three times. In 2022, *The Lilt of the Rebel* made list of 11 and this year, *Grit* has made the list of three. If you look at 2013 to 2023, it is ten years and I have been listed five times for the prize.

It is obvious that I have been very competitive and desirous of winning the prize. But there is something that is also important. The Nigeria LNG has made a massive investment in our literary space. There is nothing compared to it. The least we can do as writers is



to produce works that are excellent and compete for the prize. This is an exciting year. In 2018, when I entered *Guerrilla Post*, the prize administrators did not get up to 100 plays in the competition. This year they have over 100 plays, which is to say that more Nigerians have become interested in competing for the genre of drama.

**Let's delve into your entry play for the prize, *Grit*. Could you provide a brief overview of the play?**

It is always difficult for me to talk about my own work, but I will say that *Grit* is a family play. It is also a socio-political play. I have set out from the beginning to write a play that shows how a family can be impacted by politics. I have created this family and situated them right at the centre of the play. Two brothers: Oyesllo and his younger brother, Okote are unable to decide on how to participate in a political process, and that conflict goes out of hand. While that is going on, they do not know that there are very powerful persons in their community who are interested in the escalation of that conflict because, in their calculation, it will serve their own political interest. At the end of the toxic politics, the brothers walk into a trap, but they are not the only ones who suffer. The community also suffers. There is a general sense of anarchy and chaos at the end of the play. There is also a potential for hope. In a nutshell, that is what

the play is about.

**Is thirst for power the main theme in the play?**

Power is central to the play. The play depicts how people perceive power, how people use power, and how people accumulate power. I mean, you cannot understand the play without understanding the dynamics of power in the play. If you look at Pa Nyimenu's family, the dynamics of power are at work there in the relationship between the father and

We can look at the equation of power between the women in the play and the men in their lives. One of my favourite characters in the play is Nmade. Nmade is a sensitive woman. She is a humane woman. She loves her husband, but she also knows that her husband is wrong. She takes steps to protect her children from the politics of her husband. The tension between her and her husband increases all through the play.



*Grit* can be defined in two ways. In one way, you look at grit as courage. In another way, you look at grit as bits of a thing, after a thing has been broken into bits. That is what happens in the play. There is the courage to speak truth to power, and there is also the exercises of power in a manner that breaks people.

the sons.

The father-figure, who obviously has been a very important person in the community, is unable to exercise control over his own children. The children have become men and are pushing in the directions that they believe are important to them. So, at the level of family, we see that the equation of power has changed, and the old man acknowledges that as children grow, time changes them.

We also see the party leaders who have grown powerful on their own brand of abusive and violent politics. They pursue their goals ruthlessly.

**Why the title, *Grit*?**

*Grit* can be defined in two ways. In one way, you look at grit as courage. In another way, you look at grit as bits of a thing, after a thing has been broken into bits. That is what happens in the play. There is the courage to

speak truth to power, and there is also the exercises of power in a manner that breaks people. Even the community at the end is broken to bits. The community is caught between courage and brokenness.

**Let's talk about the socio-political allusions in *Grit*.**

Writing is an act of courage. I mean, frankly speaking on different levels, the courage to create art. Once you create a piece of art, there is something that will count: the evaluation of the artistic merit of the art. To put art in the open, in the first place, is an exercise of courage. There also must be a form of social relevance in the work; we are expected to use art as an instrument for the depiction of society. Writing enables the writer to speak truth to power. Thus, I see *Grit* as my commitment to speak truth to power.

**What motivated your choice of characters in the first place?**

Every play gives rise to its own characters. That is an academic thing to say, but it is essentially true. If the characters in a play do not appear as if that play is a natural habitat for them, then the play has failed. When characters come into a play, that play must become their natural environment. Everything that happens must be seamless. The characters must wear the play and the play must wear them. In the hands of

a playwright who is perceptive, every character that comes into a play becomes significant to the advancement of the plot of a play, and there is no need for a surplus character. If you add any character in a play that does not advance that play, that character is surplus and is unnecessary. At every point in *Grit*, I have made sure that the characters advance the plot of the play.

### **Can you share some insights into the creative process behind *Grit*?**

I started thinking about *Grit* some years back, took some notes, jotted a few things down and I was almost certain that I was going to find time to write it in 2021 when I was in Oxford as a visiting professor.

But, somehow, I just could not write it. Between that year and last year, when I moved from one house or another, I misplaced the draft of the play. I knew I needed to write that play. In the process of creating this play afresh, some of the ideas that I had in my initial effort did not make it to the present form of the play. The characters have taken different lives, and the plot of the play has taken an entirely different pattern. The play has grown over time to become what it has become, and I do not think that I would have written a better play if I had continued with the previous draft. I believe that what has emerged is a lot better.

### **Were there any particularly challenging moments?**

The most challenging moment was looking for the draft and not finding it. When I could not find that draft, I was not sure I was ever going to write the play. There is always something painful about losing a manuscript.

The setback was painful, but I was able to get around it. I just had to do it. I was not sure I was going to succeed. If I had set out to produce the exact script, I would not have been able to write this play. The other option would have been to wait, keep searching and hoping to stumble on the script and then finish it. Once I made up my mind to recreate the play, I found out that there was a new burst of energy that came into me, and I started working in the light of that decision to recreate the original idea.

### **What did you intend to achieve with this play?**

I intended to write a great play. Frankly, that is it for me. I see literature essentially as art. I understand that literature can have social commentary and have didactic value, but I see literature essentially as art. No matter what the content or context is, if it does not pass the test of aesthetics, then for me, it is not good literature at all.

### ***Grit* has received significant attention as one of the shortlisted works for the Nigeria Prize for Literature. What do you believe sets this play apart and caught the organizers' attention?**

I can tell you; I have been asked this question a thousand times. The play will appeal to different persons in different ways. I feel excited that I am on the list of three, but there is also a complex side to it: is it possible to write a great play?

**Being one of the final three playwrights shortlisted for the Nigeria Prize for Literature, how do you feel about this achievement after a rigorous selection process involving 100 other playwrights?**

No serious writer writes entirely for awards and this statement is not original. Writers write for artistic excellence, but awards and prizes are important. A reward system is important to energize a cultural space and I celebrate the reward system that the Nigeria LNG Limited has created for Nigerian writers. In fact, I am a fan of the Nigeria Prize for Literature. I have launched a one-man campaign, calling on Nigerian institutions and individuals to institute more prizes. I want more prizes in place to energize the creative space.

**If the Nigeria Prize for Literature were to be announced, how would you react if one of the other two nominees won?**

I do not have the time to be upset about such things. I will move on to another

book project. We should not weep over what we did not win; we have other things that we have won; and there are more prizes to be won.

### **What exciting projects should Nigerians and other readers of African literature worldwide expect from you?**

My collection of essays, *Free Troubles*, will be released by Masobe Books before the end of the year. That is something to look out for. But I am not done with *Grit*. One of the things I want to do about *Grit* is to promote it. I think that *Grit* deserves to be promoted whether it wins this award or not. I believe that *Grit* can be a play that defines the new momentum in Nigerian drama whether it wins or not. I think it is a significant play that has come at the right time. For sometime now, public reception has been depressed for drama, which is particularly the reason why I am giving out free copies of *Grit*. I have spoken to other playwrights to seize the momentum and use the longlist and the shortlist as basis for energizing public reception, public attention, and public perception of Nigerian drama.

If everybody keys into the project, I can tell you that the 11 plays on the longlist are significant enough to create a boost of conversation that will make Nigerians begin to pay attention to drama. We can look at our literary development and say that in the year 2023, 11 Nigerian playwrights who

have been listed for the Nigerian Prize for Literature have taken their art seriously enough to promote their plays and have rekindled public interest in drama.

**Is there anything you would like to express to the sponsors of the Nigeria Prize for Literature?**

It will be nice to give consolation prizes to the second and third writers on the shortlist. However, I am happy that they have kept the prize alive. Everyone ought to know by now that I am a fan of the Nigerian Prize for Literature. The significance of the prize is bigger than the statement of a jury. For two reasons. It is the biggest reward for literature in our country and on our continent, and it is something to be proud of. We should all be proud that we have the biggest literary prize on the continent. Every year, at least one Nigerian writer gets to win the prize regardless of where the person comes from. One of us gets to win the prize every year. That is a beautiful story. It keeps hope alive. That is the one side of it. But this is what is bigger: every year, it becomes a showcase for Nigerian writers across age brackets. Romeo Oriogun won it last year; he is in his 30s. In 2017, Seun Lanre-Williams was 25 when he made the list of 11. We have seen writers in their twenties and thirties and forties compete with writers in their sixties and seventies; some have been

longlisted or shortlisted or have won the prize. It is a big narrative about the Nigerian creative space. It means that our creativity is not tied to only one age bracket. Nigerians across all age brackets are creating good literature and we need to leverage on that to show the intensity of creativity that is at work in our national space.

You know that when the Nigerian Prize for Literature started, the prize was open entirely to Nigerian writers who were resident in Nigeria. Some people complained that the prize had given protection to Nigerian writers in the country. They implied that if Nigerian writers abroad competed with those at home, those abroad would beat everyone at home. But look at what has happened.

Nigerian writers abroad are competing, and they have not quite dominated the prize. They have not. Every year, you see works of merit written by Nigerians who are at home and Nigerians abroad. We keep making that statement because the creativity of Nigerians is not tied to one space. In fact, we are as creative at our home as we are creative abroad. Wherever we go as a people, we carry ingenuity, we carry integrity, we carry resilience, we carry our capacity to make meaning. We are amongst the bravest people in the world.



The significance of the prize is bigger than the statement of a jury. For two reasons. It is the biggest reward for literature in our country and on our continent, and it is something to be proud of. We should all be proud that we have the biggest literary prize on the continent.





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# WHEN 11 PLAYWRIGHTS TOOK THE SPOTLIGHT TO THRILL LITERARY ENTHUSIASTS AT CORA-NLNG BOOK PARTY 2023

By Godwin Okondo

'Drama now taking a backseat with the rise of cinema, television culture.'  
We can't give drama the responsibility of solving problems, but to ask questions, to investigate society.

# WHEN 11 PLAYWRIGHTS TOOK THE SPOTLIGHT TO THRILL LITERARY ENTHUSIASTS AT CORA-NLNG BOOK PARTY 2023

**A**CTORS Francis Onwochei, Ropo Ewenla, Hadiza Yadoo, Anwuli Onwochei and Bridget Okonkwo provided the first insight into the 11 plays competing for The Nigeria Prize for Literature 2023 as they regaled the on-site and online audience of literary enthusiasts with excerpts from the 11 plays. This was after the Programme Chair of Committee for Relevant Art (CORA), Mr. Jahman Anikulapo steered the proceedings to the point of close conversation with the playwrights on their motivations for writing and how their plays responds to the socio-cultural they are set. On hand to steer the conversation was journalist and writer, Mr. Anote Ajeluorou, through whom the audience gained further insight in the works at yet another memorable CORA-NLNG Book Party at the Shell Hall of MUSON Centre, Onikan, Lagos on Sunday, August 6, 2023. This year is dedicated to the genre of drama.

First was the author of *The Brigadiers of a Mad Tribe*, Abuchi Modilim, who said his play “explores the Igbo metaphysics, world view and cosmology. It’s also a political satire that mirrors our society and most prominent matters ongoing now.” Modilim further provided his thoughts on the state of drama in the society, noting that the challenge of staging a play, an essential requirement for good drama, was huge, adding, “A play is not complete (without performing it on stage), because like everyone said, it’s not like other genres that you just have to read. A play is fully appreciated when it is staged in theatre, so it’s not easy for playwrights, because when you don’t have producers to stage your play, you have to do that with your money and writers don’t make much from writing in this part of the world.”

US-based Abideen Abolaji Ojomu, author of *Ojuelegba Crossroads*, who joined vir-

tually, said his play is about self-hate among Africans, a situation he said has stifled meaningful development on the continent and why others, look down on Africans. He canvassed a change of attitude and self-love.

“My book explores the need for Africans to come together,” Ojomu said. “As Africans, we don’t love ourselves and that’s the reason for racism. My book is trying to project a paradigm where Africans appreciate the fact that we need to unite, and that’s only when we can take advantage of our resources without being at the mercy of the world. Ojuelegba teaches that if we take care of ourselves, we can take Africa to a greater place. The reasons for the Nigeria Civil War are still with us. We are unable to resolve our differences. Every time there is discussion on the need for us to go our separate ways, but we can do more when we work together.” Titled in Hausa, *Gidan Juju*,

according to Prof. Victor S. Dugga, “tells a story of the ethnic groups in North Central Nigeria. It is said that if the story of the hunt is told from the perspective of the hunter, the lion will always die. So, the lion needs to tell his own story, so you can see his perspective. There are many groups in North Central Nigeria with untold stories, or told from the perspective of the hunter. What I’ve done is tell the story that has not been heard, in the last days of colonialism, going back to history and forecasting to the present where we seem to be losing tradition and are at a crossroads, and not knowing how to embrace technology and modernity. I have some suggestions in the play as to how this should go forward. I want to thank the Nigeria LNG for the prize because it has become increasingly difficult for writers to continue to write without encouragement, and the expectation, for me, is that people will read and understand, and continue bring-



ing ideas on board because ideas build a nation. This engagement with literature is to enhance our ideas.”

Although drama is a compelling genre that should have mass appeal on account of its communal nature, Dugga said the reality on ground was different, because, according to him, “The first challenge is lack of theatre houses, so we have not built a culture of raising an audience to promote your plays. Compared to the novel genre, drama is the one that can educate more people, especially in a very large, illiterate population. People can understand your drama, even if they don’t understand the grammar you are speaking. You need to raise an audience and also perform the plays. I took a look at the generation of Soyinka; today he is called Kongi, even though he has written other genres, but drama seems to be the most outstanding. I teach playwriting, and some of the ideas that come up are really fantastic, but when people are out of this training with motive to display their art, it mortifies and they simply find their way into some other industries. We have damaged a lot of playwrights by not giving them expression. We need to encourage more of corporate sponsorships, and I think that would encourage people.”

For Cheta Igbokwe, *Homecoming* was borne out a particular moment in his family life when he had to receive a relative he had

not seen in 11 years. The weight of waiting became the subject that informed his crafting the *Homecoming*. He expressed gratitude to the prize sponsor, Nigeria LNG, saying, “I want to thank Nigeria LNG for bringing me to Lagos, because I wrote the very first dialogue of *Homecoming* here in Lagos, at Murta-la Mohammed airport in January 18, 2019. I was in Lagos to receive my sister who had been out of the country for 11 years, and I was the only family member in Lagos then. Every flight that came in looked like hers. The family had given me the burden to receive her

Like Duga, Igbokwe also enumerated the challenges of staging a play in an impoverished environment where tickets for a show might be unaffordable for most citizens. “*Homecoming* was first performed at the Arts Theatre at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), on May 6, 2021, and August 5, 2021,” he informed his audience. “And earlier this year, it was read at the University of Iowa, US, on May 5. And recently, I also had a new play, *Awele*, performed at UNN. So, I could say that I have two experiences of my play being performed on stage, and I can start now to

rehearsals and don’t even get the payment that established actors get. “Imagine taking this play out of the school to a place where the people who are working in different sectors come for rehearsals after work. Will you pay their transport fare? What are you going to pay them if you decide to make it their fulltime job? It’s really expensive, and I think what helped past generations of Nigerian playwrights was because most of them were professors. So, it was easy to write plays and it gets into the hands of students who dramatize them, but if you do not have the luxury



on arrival, but my own burden was if I would be able to recognize someone who left when I was 11. Though we see pictures on social media, but I wondered what it would feel like if I failed to recognize my beloved sister, and I had this burden of waiting for her and praying that I recognize her, and I then decided to write a story about the problem of recognition, and that is the story of *Homecoming*.”

make the argument of how expensive theatre is. If you were in Nsukka last month to see *Awele*, you wouldn’t believe it cost us N1.5 million to put it on stage, because you are going to pay actors and directors, and producers will look for funding to make sure the lighting manager, stage designer and theatre hall are being paid for. And then it is even cheaper in universities, because students come for

of teaching in the university, you just rely on producers finding your play worthy and performing it. With the kind of budget in the country now, directors are struggling and you are talking about a stage play where people find it difficult to pay N1,000 for ticket to see it. You can’t take it outside because of funding.” Fifth timer on the longlist with poetry and drama, and author of *Grit*, Prof. Obari

Gomba is not new to political themes as his last drama outing *Guerrilla Post* threads a similar path. Gomba's candour earned him applause as to the mechanics of a jury in a prestigious prize as The Nigeria Prize for Literature, and commended the prize sponsors for energising the Nigerian literary scene. Gomba called on other corporate entities to emulate Nigeria LNG to expand the scope and reach of the literary scene.

According to him, "I wanted to write a play about politics. It turned out to be that there is an interface between the domestic family and the public in the play, and it creates abrasions between the central characters, until we come to a point where the family is as endangered as the society. I'm also excited about the infusion of music and spectacles in the play.

"I've learnt something about cautious optimism, because I have been on this stage for the fifth time, but what I do understand is that the value of this prize is bigger than the verdict of the jury. This is the biggest reward system for the creative writing sector in Nigeria, and every year, we get to position ourselves for this prize which brings blessings to the life of the winner. I pray that the Nigeria LNG continues to thrive and invest in this prize, and let's hope other companies can learn from what they are doing. We have a cast of writers across generations every year. This shows that our creativity is not tied to any

age bracket. Nigerians are creating works of excellence across generations. That is the biggest story from this investment."

"There isn't a single role for drama if we are trying to establish a role it plays," Gomba said in response to his thoughts on the state of drama and literature in Nigerian society today, stating that Nigerian drama has a fantastic future in spite of it seeming to have taken a backseat on account of technology. "The primary role of a play is to be a play, and that does not mean that it has no social value. It has to be a good play, and the old maxim: 'to teach and delight' has been established through time; so, what drama does is representation.

"As to where it is today, it is fantastic that we have this cast of playwrights, because if you look at Nigerian literature, it seems that drama is now taking a backseat with the rise of cinema and television culture. But we must give credit to those who are continuously creating plays. If we talk about playwriting, it doesn't have the same visibility as prose fiction and poetry in contemporary Nigerian literary space, which is to say that the playwrights on this table are lovers of drama. If there is a genre that deserves a greater intervention now it's drama, because a lot of things go into the production of a play. If I write a novel and go through the editorial process, I find myself a publisher and the book is out in the public.

But for a play to be a play, I have to do a presentation and stage it, which is also part of the coming alive of that play, and I hope to publish it.

"The investment has many layers you did not find applicable to the other genres, but the good thing is that we are still producing drama, even if it is not as big as those days when Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi were producing

izing principle behind the global concept of migration. The two biggest topics of global discuss in the 21st century are climate crisis and migration. *The Boat People* addresses the latter. This is about the whole concept of people migrating from the Global South to the Northern Hemisphere. *The Boat People* dramatizes this concept of people from African countries moving through Niger to Libya, through the



Nollywood actress, Taiwo Ajai-Lycett, at the CORA-NPL Book Party 2023

good plays in our university system. What this means is that there is a call on all of us to take drama from the closets of the universities, bring them squarely to town, and we must thank those who are doing it now, because all of us must get involved in that process."

Illegal or irregular migration is theme of Prof. Chris Anyokwu's *The Boat People*, who said his play is based on "a great motif, an organ-

Mediterranean Sea on rickety boats that very often capsize. We are talking of Africans who try to travel to Europe on overloaded boats and end up drowning. We have a plethora of stories in that regard. The idea is for the government and that of the Global South to look inward to see how they can fix their economies to create a better life for their citizens."

Although drama or play might not solve social

problems, Anyokwu said, however, that “Drama, and every profession under the sun, is a form of storytelling. For drama, you tell stories by acting it out on stage, and drama is an imitation of an action, and right at the heart of the philosophy of drama is mimicry, which rides on the principle of entertainment, but you are joking seriously. I believe that a writer who abandons his serious duty is just like that ridiculous person in the tale who runs after a rat fleeing from the flames, when his house is on fire. What

they feel better.”

Olubunmi Familoni’s *When Big Masquerades Dance Naked* also threshees political theme in response to how the people are serially betrayed by politicians and the need for their unmasking.

“Masquerades are a representation of African spirits, and that mask is what makes them accessible to humans,” he said. “So, I used that as a metaphor for the story I’m telling in this book, because it’s the story of the tussle

seen this happening and that is the story I’m trying to tell. The people were putting up a resistance against a corrupt politician and also their king who is colluding with him as well.”

The role of drama, according to Familoni, is not to be prescriptive or provide answers to social problems, but to engage in the philosophical quest of providing stimuli that point the people in the right direction.

“Just like every other literary

of solving problems, but you have to be able to ask questions, to investigate society. When mirroring society, you are also investigating the problem as well. In my book, I talked about the people rising up against the elites; it asks the question: ‘why are they inaccessible in the first place and why are they binding together against the lower classes?’”

“Ask these questions and let society see your play and think about how things are. After drama has done all of



Some participants at the 2023 CORA-NPL Book Party

writers do, as the moral barometer of society, is to hold up the mirror, bring out their strengths and weaknesses. I believe that drama plays an important role in society, one of which is therapy. Drama, as a genre of literature, is there to address problems of society with a view to making sure that people in society are able to overcome them. Drama is very important. People go to the theatre to see a play and are entertained, laugh and overcome some anxiety, and

between the elites and the people. In this case, the masquerades are the elites the people are fighting against. You are not supposed to unmask a masquerade, because it’s a taboo and it would cause problems for that person or community. At the climax of this book, the politicians and king were unmasked, and that’s where the shame and disgrace come from. We have seen the resistance of the people against the power of the elites, and we have

genre, people talk about how art is something that is supposed to teach, build a moralistic society and things like that,” Familoni offered. “This question has been a debate as far back as the 17th century, but I think we have to situate these questions in societies, because societies are not homogeneous. One of the things drama should do in a society is answer very important philosophical and political questions. We can’t give drama the responsibility

that in the society, then it can entertain, because you can’t begin to dance when you haven’t solved your problems. In society where they don’t have as much basic problems as we have, then you can argue about art for arts sake and make people laugh, but we can’t afford that in our society. First, you have to teach, then ask questions, before you think about making people laugh.” With *Where is Patient Zero?*, Olatunbosun Taofeek is



asking questions about the politics of medicine, ethical questions about the conduct of pharmaceutical companies during the pandemic and the high drama about Covid-19 that held the world hostage and lockdown.

According to him, “The inspiration came from the Covid-19 period, and out of everything happening at that period, there was this problem everyone kept ignoring and the West tried to cover it up, and that question is, ‘who is patient zero - the first carrier of the virus?’ At a point in the discourse, China was being accused and UK talked about a lab, and at a point, we couldn’t hear anything. At that point in time, I was close to my television to monitor the case to see how these guys want to disguise or answer this question, because I believe the response would have been answered if we knew the first carrier, but since we don’t know who he was, another virus which would be more deadly is likely to surface. If the leaders and scientists could not provide that answer, I thought a creative work should respond to this question, and that was how the play came about. The president in the play is fed up with the university institutions, and he decides to lock them up and give the keys to people in Europe. He gathers scientists from this side of the country but it seems like a political game, people moderating the happenings behind the scene, and when the president could not give a solution, he decides to go into the virus business and

introduce it into the environment.”

Taofeek’s play sums up the West’s attitude to the non-democratisation of vaccine, the unfairness of it all and calls for accountability of medical and pharmaceutical practitioners to the shroud of secrecy that tended to becloud the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Looking at what is happening at the global level, we have come to understand that there seems to be a very high level of unfair play, and this unfair game going on at the international level is seriously affecting everyone,” he said. “Actually, science should be devoid of politics, but what we have come to realize is that there seems to be politics in medical practice. Was it a experiment that went wrong,

and the people involved were not accountable? Similarly, ebola virus came and it was shrouded in secrecy, and they tell us the story of people eating bats. You need to be an intellectual to understand the questions being asked, and the fact is that everybody must be accountable of every patient dying in the hospital. That way they will be careful whatever they’re doing. Likewise, you need to hold me accountable if I’m not able to perform up to the expectation of a literary person. “We are yet to hold people in medicine accountable for what happened to us during Covid19. Look at the way the vaccine went. Some pharmaceutical companies made billions from it, and the vaccines were not available to some people in parts of the world. Do you want to tell me that all those are not

conspiracies? The play is trying to tell the world that they shouldn’t think we’re not intelligent, because of our level of poverty, or that we don’t know what is happening at the global scene. We have to hold them accountable. After this, let us ask them to provide patient zero to the world.”

Henry Akubuiro’s historical play *Yamtarawala - The Warrior King* takes a different tone, however, but also extends the interrogation intent of drama with a view to unearthing the less known cultural life of a people. But like all kingdoms, there’s always trouble, as Yamtarawala’s own son rose up against him.

“I want to interrogate history, and when I come across the story of Yamtarawala, who was a Kanuri priest from the



Mr Andy Odeh, General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development, NLNG speaking at the 2023 CORA-NPL Book Party.

Borno Empire,” Akubuiro explained. “The story is set in the 16th century. Nothing seems to be coming out of that part of Nigeria, and they have lots of stories that haven’t been dramatized. There’s this real life character that founded Biu kingdom. The kingdom is the second largest emirate in Borno State after Maiduguri. They broke away from Gazagamo, which was the capital of ancient Kanem Borno Empire that was founded in the 7th century.

been overrun by Boko Haram until now.

“In the play, I tried to interrogate history as to how it relates to the present. This powerful personality who is being compared to Shaka Zulu or Moremi, why are we not celebrating these kind of personalities? These are untold stories of Northeast Nigeria, so I decided to recreate this story using drama. I’m talking about the resilience of man. If you read

an Islamic background. He showed that resilience and that he was born a king. So, he was able to overcome all obstacles in his way. Another one is that you find culture and dances (in the play) you have never seen in Nigerian theatre before. So, I’m trying to bring into focus this part of Nigeria – culture-wise and history-wise.

“What do you learn from Yamtarawala? Aside founding the kingdom, towards

got what he wanted, but he couldn’t manage it eventually, so he died. That’s in a nutshell.

Author of *The Spellbinder*, elder Prof. Bode Sowande, who also joined the conversation virtually, has mental health in society as his preoccupation. However, the subjects of his drama are politicians who his inquiry illuminates in an intriguing manner, as to the cause of most political actions, whether they shouldn’t be traced to mental illness that these characters secretly suffer.

“My motivation for my play has many layers,” according to septuagenarian. “The challenge of mental health is monumental. There is a lot of it in Nigerian politics. Not everyone with mental health challenge roams the streets in rags. It’s the inability to communicate, feeling locked in or out, and can be defined in so many words by psychiatrists. In my play, there are lots of characters troubled by this issue, in different situations, and therapy comes through the ability to break down barriers of communication. In the play, you have three billionaires, two suffering from mental health challenge and one suffering from the stigma of mental health challenge, not even remembering that his wife had post-partum psychosis when his child was born. How do you handle mental health in Nigeria? That is the whole purpose of the play.”

The audience, too, has a say in the matter as they asked



Guests at the CORA-NPL Book Party 2023

By the 16th century, there was a division in Kanem Borno Empire over the right of succession between the two sons of the living king of Gazagamo. Abdullahi, who later became Yamtarawala, was the first son of the king, and the younger son moved southward to found his kingdom, which is Biu, which is the only place that has never

the play, you find out that when Yamtarawala fell out with Kanem Borno Empire, instead of fighting his brother, he moved southward to found his own empire, and it wasn’t an easy journey for him. It took him many years. He conquered territories and came across so many kingdoms and chiefdoms, and he was coming from

the end of his lifetime, he decided to conquer his own family, and his son rose up against him. The father became larger than life. He was scared of his own shadow. He saw his son as a threat and his son revolted against him, and then he committed suicide. So, when you become a leader, how do you manage your success? Yamtarawala

the writers questions of their own. What are the chances of using drama to change politicians to work for society. Duga's response was illuminating, when he said, "If you want to use your drama to change politicians, you may fail woefully. They do not necessarily have the time to attend to you or read. However, drama is used to conscientise people, and when they are, the politicians will get to know and listen to the people. On the digital aspect, we are facing a challenge. AI is coming through. I've done some analysis and that thing is so sharp. We have to do a lot to get our books out there. If we are going to produce an audiobook, we need industries to digitize them. We need secondary industries to support creative writers." On how to maximise virtual performances and audiobooks, Obari said although he was open to such possibility, he was however, cautious especially putting his plays in film format: "I want to make copies of this play for people to read and also make it available online, and hope those who can't buy physical copies can buy them. They are already accessible in online platforms. People have asked me to convert the play to screen script, but I'm very cautious about moving forward. Let's hope I get to win, then I can make big investments."

For young writers wishing to hone their craft, Anyok-

wu advised that "Writers should write in a way that their books get to the end user, so upcoming writers use them as models for their own work. We have lots of challenges in Nigeria, but it's important to have a value chain in the book business, so that the writer is not the one who does everything. For those of us who write, drama comes to us better than other genres, and drama is the most conventional platform. You just see your work memorized and it is so immediate. You don't need to sit alone like a solo reader, but you are in a community of co-creators." In an era of tech, digital marketing and Artificial Intelligence, Familoni provided a context for playwrights to navigate a tricky terrain, saying, "Literature has to move in time with technological advancement, and it has become easier for poetry and prose. Drama has had challenges, because we know that from the history of drama, it is primarily on stage, and very much versatile. When you start filming it, it is no longer on stage. Removing drama from the stage medium makes it no longer a play.

"Using tech, people film dramas on stage and put it on streaming platforms, so it's still there in its original form and it's married to tech. There is a negative aspect to it, like AI. There is currently a writers' strike in the US, because they are being

replaced with AI, and if that begins to happen in drama, playwrights will be out of work. We have felt these things and are writing from experiences which technology doesn't have."

For a writer who hails from the Southeast, lives in the Southwest, how did Akubuiro manage to gather resources for a story steeped in Northern history?

"There is a book written by the president of the Nigerian Folklore Society (NFS), Dr. Bukar Usman, *The History of Biu*. He gave it to me to review. After reading, I saw something beyond review and he asked if I wanted to go to Borno State to do a journalistic story on that part of the state, but I refused. So he sent the Galadima of the state to convince me to go and see things from that part of Nigeria, and I did and was fascinated by the culture. My interest for that drama grew, and last year when I was writing this play, I went to the Emir's palace in Borno and asked him questions on the artefacts and Yamtarawa story. I also spent time with the people to learn about them and I used that information to write this play and I'm happy that the people from that part are excited, because an Igbo man came from the east to write their story."





Music and dance performance at the CORA-NPL Book Party 2023





# NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

2023

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MEET

# Professor Hippolite Amadi

WINNER OF THE 2023 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR SCIENCE

By Titi Horsfall





[Please introduce yourself and tell us what you do.](#)

I am Hippolite Amadi, Professor of Medical Engineering & Technology at Imperial College London, and the Principal Consultant at Neonatal Concerns for Africa charitable organisation. What I do? I am essentially, a scientific researcher in the fields of orthopaedics biomechanics and neonatal interventions and procedures

[What was your childhood dream?](#)

I wanted to be a bomb and explosive scientist, later a pilot, later a doctor, and finally a medical engineer, just before I entered the university as a teenager.

[What led you to study Medical Engineering and Technology?](#)

I am not too sure, but those early years I was attracted to any big-sounding profession I came across because I felt I was smart and could study any course, no matter how difficult. Medical Engineering was emerging and only popular in the developed world, and looked like scientists in the field were the best brains in the world,

hence I was attracted to it.

[Let's talk about the impact of your work.](#)

My neonatology work in Nigeria has been of very high impact since 1996 when I began this at the special care baby unit of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, through the years till date. Conclusively, I have by a journal publication of this 2023, generated a regional proof-of-concept of the packaged NRS, demonstrating the bringing down of neonatal mortality of Minna Region of Niger State from 90% to 4% in a space of 5 years.

[What inspired you to focus on neonatal and child health?](#)

My inspiration to focus on neonatal health was borne out of passion – 1st, to save vulnerable innocent lives, and 2nd, to push the boundaries and narrow-down Nigeria's global shame, until she is delisted in the committee of worst-neonatal-mortality-nations of the world.

The concept of breathing means everything to everybody, not just me. This is because no one can sustain his/her life without constant continuous breathing –

whether autonomously and physiologically powered or through technologies such as I have innovated.

[Has your work met the purpose for which you created it?](#)

The respiratory technologies in conjunction with my other aspects of neonatal interventions have absolutely met the purposes for which I created them.

[Why did you apply for the 2023 Nigeria prize this year?](#)

I began my neonatal project in 1996 with a clear picture of my 'end-game.' It was too ambitious than to be realised in a lifetime. My dream was to work as fast as I could, and as hard as I could to attempt to achieve the total description of the course of high neonatal mortality in Nigeria, providing possible interventions and mitigations and showcasing its proof-of-concept and declaring the end of this wherever my solutions could be adopted. Therefore, I refused to be distracted over these years. It has been over a quarter century. I finally achieved my desired 'End Game' at the end of 2022. Hence, it was ripe to enter the competition as a mean

of showcasing what Nigeria has been benefiting from but had been kept under cover for whatever reasons.

My entry project for the 2023 award was the package of 'Neonatal respiratory support technologies.' one of 7 packages I have created in my 25 years of neonatal research for resource-constrained settings. This is essentially a group of three technologies that work together to assist a distressed newborn baby to breathe for survival. This is a major reason and one of the highest contributing factors for Nigeria's high neonatal mortality rate today.

[Please walk us through the process of using the innovative respiratory technologies.](#)

(i) The PoliteheartCPAP machine, which is a non-invasive ventilator for newly born babies. A distressed newborn, that cannot breathe on its own is assisted by latching its nostril to this machine through a nasal prong and cannula. The machine has sensors to measure and report neonate's oxygen saturation levels. It mixes appropriate air + oxygen and delivers

this to baby, using water column to control a desired positive pressure during this process. Hence, this machine essentially operates the breathing process for the neonate to keep it alive. My initial prototype of the politeheartCPAP is displayed in one of our laboratories here in Imperial College Bioengineering.

(ii) The Politeo2blend system enables the clinician to deliver an appropriate mixture of oxygen and atmospheric air in a safe manner to the distressed neonate in the absence of a proper non-invasive ventilator.

(iii) The Politeoxygen splitter system is an installation that enables one oxygen source, such as an oxygen-cylinder or oxygen-concentrator, to be applied in a manner that up to 8 neonates could receive oxygen therapy simultaneously from it, instead of the conventional 'one-cylinder-to-one-neonate,' thereby expanding the utility of one oxygen source by 700%.

My work is unique because this addresses very tangible and real needs of Nigeria, which impacts every Nigerian family. Wherever babies are born, my work is unique. Nigeria has a huge global shame that is constantly brushed aside with a pretence of ignorance. This is that we are a population of 280 million people, but we bury 846 babies every day as the nation with the highest indices of neonatal mortality rate in the whole world, even worse than India of 1.3 billion people (5 times as populated as Nigeria). The

United Nations, UNICEF, STC, etc, cannot solve this problem for Nigeria or Africa. The earlier the continent understands this, the better for our dying neonates. It is only Nigerians that can solve this problem for themselves. My dream was to strategically identify all the pitfalls and give this problem a complete decisive solution – and this I have done with the full package of my Neonatal Rescue Scheme (NRS) for which this celebrated respiratory technologies constitute only 23%.

**Collaboration is often critical in scientific breakthroughs. Can you share any insights on the collaborative efforts or partnerships that were instrumental in the development of this technology?**

I enjoyed quite a few collaborative efforts over the last 25 years, and I must posthumously acknowledge the quantum of encouragements I received from the late Professor Jonathan C Azubuike. The committee of CMDs of Nigeria federal tertiary hospitals as led by Professor

Sulema Aremu Kuranga and Dr Peter Alabi. Also, Professor Uria Etawo of University of PH Teaching Hospital and Professor Akin Osibogun of Lagos University Teaching Hospital. The tireless members of my Nigeria-wide Lab such as Professor Bello Mohammed Kawuwa of University of Maiduguri, Dr Kudirat Olateju of University of Abuja, Dr Amina Abubakar Bello of Kaduna State University and Professor Olugbenga Mokuolu of University of Ilorin.

The Nigerian society of neonatal medicine (NISONM) as led by Professor Mustapha Bello. The bioengineering department of Imperial College London as led by Professor Anthony Bull. The members of my Central Technical Team (CTT) at neonatal concerns for Africa – Engr Peter Onyeri, Engr Onyeabor Ebenmelu, Mr Chuks Ugboeme, Jude Chima Nzerem and Jerry Okoye. Finally, the cooperation and support of my wonderful family – my wife, Mrs Iphii Amadi and all my daughters.

**What would you say were the challenges while creating this technology?**

The challenges whilst creating these devices were so many. I needed to make it a device that the 'Nigerian naira could buy.' Hence, selection of appropriate and affordable material components was a challenge. I also needed to create a system that must remain reliable in the face of unreliable grid power in Nigeria. Atmospheric air supply was an inevitable essential consumable, therefore, I needed to create a system that could continue to run after an accidental shutdown of a compressor. I needed to create a system that would not need too much mental power to operate in the face of a traumatised workforce in Nigeria. The system must be simple enough to be operated by a basic medical assistant in a typical Nigeria primary healthcare facility, etc. This list was long. Do not forget, I had to travel many dangerous terrains across Nigeria to reach distant places, even after flying into the country, travelling day and night into the hinterlands and politically



The PoliteheartCPAP machine at Calabar Women & Children Hospital

troubled places.

### How did you overcome them?

I basically overcame these challenges by consistency of purpose. I was focused and refused to be distracted even when unnecessary mud was being thrown to stumble my progress. A never-giving-up spirit requiring so many repetitions of material testing, numerous re-designing, and component re-testing. Many failures occurred, but I never gave up until I achieved all.

### How long did it take for this innovation to come to life?

The time stretch to develop the respiratory systems. From conceptualisation, early in 2015 to full clinical deployment of the politeheartCPAP took a total of 42 months. The politeo2-blend and the PSS, each took fewer months in the making than the ventilator, one after the other.

### Initially, how was the innovation perceived by society and peers within your field?

In terms of initial societal perception, these were not my first medical and neonatal inventions. My earlier thermoneutral systems were already major lifesaving devices in the Nigerian healthcare space. Therefore, the initial perception for the respiratory support systems were positive and supportive, hence encouraged a quick integration and deploy-ability. Moreover, they were stepping to existing healthcare gaps

with no stable solutions. So, there was no room for any scientific 'prank playing' as lives were at stake.

### At what point did you have the conviction that you were making progress or moving in the right direction?

My point of conviction of the right direction was not dramatic. This was because I was driven by clearly identified and defined needs. The prototyping stage of each innovation was also the point of deciding

time convinced I was moving in the right direction with my progress.

### When you were announced the winner of the 2023 Nigeria Prize for Science, how did you feel about it?

I got to know about the winning entry one day after its announcement. I was happy, but I did not consider it as a total victory because neonates are still dying in their numbers in Nigeria as we speak. The win is



... Africans were created with brains and can think and create; no foreigner understands African problems better than Africans; an engaged, challenged and empowered African mind would develop the best culturally and climatically compliant solutions for the peculiar problems on the continent; every inspired African MUST navigate the odds, demonstrate their capabilities to pushing known boundaries of our deficiencies and hence, inspire others

whether to go back to the drawing board if achieved parameters fail to meet my set design goals. I was constantly testing, trialling, and peer-reviewing and publishing. Each successful solution generated a proof-of-concept that was clinically and scientifically acceptable through international journal peer-review processes. Therefore, I tackled the numerous segments of the neonatal problems, one at a time, before I moved on to the next. Hence, I was all the

only the beginning of my victory. Remember, this is a journey that has lasted well over 26 years, taking me to every part of Nigeria, from Calabar-PH across Abuja to Maiduguri and Sokoto, and from Abeokuta-Lagos across Lokoja to Nguru-Kano-Katsina, across all regions of Nigeria and well over 50 cities and villages, and far into the hinterlands of the North, Middlebelt and the South.

### Personally, what does this win mean for you?

What this means for me, personally, is that the Nigerian LNG and all their partner organisations would henceforth join me and help to amplify the cry of a dying Nigerian neonate, who is BORN TO LIVE, NOT TO DIE.

### What are your thoughts on Africans taking the lead in developing solutions not only for Africa but also for the global community?

My thoughts on Africans taking the lead in developing their solutions are: that Africans were created with brains and can think and create; no foreigner understands African problems better than Africans; an engaged, challenged and empowered African mind would develop the best culturally and climatically compliant solutions for the peculiar problems on the continent; every inspired African MUST navigate the odds, demonstrate their capabilities to pushing known boundaries of our deficiencies and hence, inspire others.


### Lastly, what are your future goals in the field of science and healthcare, and how do you plan to build upon your current success?

My future goals are to complete the present focus on neonatal survival. My current goal of stopping every preventable neonatal death in Nigeria has only, by the event of this award, started the beginning of its completion. Thank you.





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**42**  
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