

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL ADEKEYE, President of Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) Europe, Belgium and Luxembourg Chapter¹

What are NIDO's objectives?

NIDO Europe is the European arm of a global Nigerian diaspora network, and acts as an umbrella organization of different country chapters. As the Belgium and Luxembourg chapter, we mainly aim at harnessing professional talents among the Nigerian community in the diaspora and facilitating the transfer of skills back home. We focus on skills, because we consider them more effective than financial remittances.

How does this work in practice?

We work, for example, with doctors, IT (information technology) professionals or financial consultants here in Belgium or Luxembourg, and look at how their skills can be transmitted back home. We put together resources from Europe and Nigeria. Every year, the company I work for gives me free laptops and desktops. We use them for trainings for schools and individuals in local communities in Nigeria, where IT skills are still low. We also give them out to people who cannot buy them. Then, we organize visits in Nigeria for other friends who would like to help. We also receive the support of young volunteers, through the Nigerian National Volunteer Service. Other NIDO organizations in Europe implement other projects to help our communities back home. Our sister organization in Germany was able to build a vocational skills training centre in Nigeria with the help of local councils, and NIDO Ireland built an anaemia screening centre in Nigeria.

What contribution can the diaspora offer to Nigeria and to countries of destination?

What we can give back home are skills, skills, skills. As the popular saying goes, we need to teach people to fish. In Nigeria, we have a big young population, but we need to improve education. We focus too much on products and neglect the service sector, which is where the future of Nigeria's economy lies. And we can help countries of destination understand where they should be helping. Now they are giving a lot of aid to Nigeria, but this rarely goes to the area of skills and vocational training. Development aid usually funds the construction of buildings and routes and water supply, but does not focus enough on underlying problems and skills needed to render progress sustainable. Governments of destination countries are also mostly working directly with origin country Governments and often not reaching the grass roots. The Nigerian diaspora has a role to play there, and should be included in talks between the Nigerian and European Governments.

What challenges do you encounter?

As NIDO aims at harnessing skills rather than money, some Nigerians in the diaspora look at us as an elitist organization. But I think that we would need the participation of all professionals here, including factory workers. They had trainings, know about health and safety standards, and could help us change the way we work in Nigeria. Together, we have the numbers to generate a little change. Some also consider NIDO an extension of the Government, because we were founded by a former Nigerian President. But even if we are a channel that the Government uses to talk to the diaspora, we do not receive much support from it.

What recommendations do you have for research, policy and programming?

First off, get Nigerians in the diaspora on board whenever talking to the Nigerian Government about trade, migration or other topics. We know why we left home and what is needed to improve the situation back home. Then, European countries need to focus more on education in Nigeria, starting from primary school and including informal training. We also need professional trainings, such as on electronics, mechanics and engineering. And we need to improve skills for the agricultural sector – such as on crops diversity, distribution and selling, in order to encourage young people to become farmers. This can also offer them alternatives to unsafe migration. And we observe that highly skilled migrants have more opportunities to migrate legally and integrate in destination countries. People who are suffering the most are those with less skills or formal education.

¹ Interview conducted by Irene Schöfberger, IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.