

World Bank, UNICEF, IOM, Italian Govt, others praise Governor Obaseki for his developmental strides

The World Bank, the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) among others have hailed Governor Godwin Obaseki for his government's impactful and life-changing reforms and programmes that have continued to translate to improved livelihoods in Edo. The Director Global Education, World Bank, Jamie Saadevadra; Chief Education Officer (Nigeria) UNICEF, Saadhna Panday and the Chief of Mission, IOM, Laurent De Boeck, while speaking in Benin City during a dinner organized by the state government, hailed Obaseki's impressive and pragmatic approach to governance and for implementing nuanced reforms and programmes to deliver on the government's development objectives and achieve progress across all sectors of the state's economy.

Others who also validated the governor's development programmes are the representative of the Italian Government and Italian Ambassador to Nigeria, Stefano De Leo; Senior Programme Officer at Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Clio Dintihac, and the Regional Vice President (Africa), Udacity, Emman Nour Ahmed Raslan, among others. The World Bank representative, who described Edo as an accelerator state, said Edo under the leadership of Governor Obaseki is among the only ten sub-nationals in the world with the political will to transform education and tackle learning poverty.

Jamie noted "Across the world, we're faced with a huge challenge; we face what I describe as a silent crisis. One that we don't see any one dying each day but we see so many children across the world, even if they go to school, are not learning or getting the skills they require to succeed in life. That's a challenge we have everywhere, including in Nigeria and Edo. "In order to confront the challenge, what we need is not just good technical decisions and designs, but political commitment and will and that is the part that's most difficult to see in many countries. We see the problems and the technical solutions but don't see the political will to take the hard decisions that are needed in order to reform education. That's one of the reasons why we call Edo State, under the leadership of Governor Godwin Obaseki, an accelerator state, together with other ten countries in the world." He added, "About four years ago, the governor made a bold statement that we need not just make sure that the teachers are in schools but that the teachers have the right engagement and interaction with students because that's how we see the magic of learning, ensuring that all children in schools learn. The government has also made strides in the use of technology. They have efficiently deployed technology in order to leverage the work of the teachers. So, what we see in Edo is a glimpse of the future because the future is about

that combination of technology and the human factor. Using technology to ensure that teachers, principals and other education players do their job as best as they can." While commending the governor for the successes recorded in the education and other sectors of the state, the UNICEF representative assured that the global education body "will continue to partner and ensure the technical support to provide all that's needed to take the EdoBEST programme to the next level."

Panday said, "Let me say how delighted we are at UNICEF to be partnering with Edo state. It has really been wonderful visiting various schools in the state. I have had the opportunity to travel and see schools across the country, and today, seeing the Edo example and what is possible and has been achieved here, it is really heartwarming. We are in 190 countries across the world and I must say that we really look forward to taking the EdoBEST programme to, not only to other states in Nigeria but to other countries across the world. Many other countries could learn from the Edo example and that's our commitment to you.

"So, we will look for the platform for His Excellency and other members of his team to share the story of how Edo has done it. Not just what you have achieved, because really a lot has been achieved here, but how you were able to achieve this. We sincerely acknowledge and commend the governor's commitment and passion to turn things around in the education sector. We will further be partnering with you on skills development and digital learning, among others."

On his part, the Italian Ambassador to Nigeria hailed the state government for the launch of the second phase of the Managing Migration through Development Project, assuring that the government will partner with the state on job creation, as well as investment and training opportunities, among others.

According to him, "The Italian Government invested about €2m in this project expected to last for two years because we strongly believe that the projects of economic development and growth by the government of Edo State led by His Excellency, Governor Godwin Obaseki need to be supported. These are innovative projects and programmes because they were drafted by the state government."

Steffano added, "We don't want to only support these projects and programmes that are important and strategic to support communities and citizens, we want to become a direct partner of Edo State bringing into Nigeria and Edo State jobs, investments and training opportunities.

"So, with the governor, we are already discussing with some relevant Italian institutions that can invest and bring job opportunities and training, not only to Nigeria but help Nigerians invest in their own country. Many Nigerians in

Italy, about 150,000 of them, are already part of the Italian society and are ready to invest in their home country. This is a starting point and will be sustained and improved upon in years to come because we're working together to make Edo State a hub of opportunities." In his response, Obaseki thanked the partners for their collaboration and support, reassuring that his administration will sustain efforts to ensure sustainable growth and development in the state.

He said, "We are here reviewing what we have done and collaborations with various partners that have led to the successes we have recorded across all sectors today. We can only say that we are in the middle of a journey. We have started a process and cannot go back. "We have shown the world that we can do it; transform ourselves and society. We've given our children hope. Sustainability

is now what we need to focus on. As a government, we have come to realize that we are limited in resources. The bulk of our resources is not cash; it is capacity. How do you help us build our capacity? Because without building capacity, we could slip back to where we are coming from. For the remaining 24 months of this tenure, our main focus is on sustainability - how do we ensure we sustain what you have helped us start and entrenched so far? He further noted, "We have agreed to step up the relationship between Edo and Europe, particularly provinces in Italy where a large number of Edo indigenes reside. We are taking steps to make sure that by spring next year, we undertake a major roadshow to expose the opportunities we have in various areas for our young people here and how the business men can also come here to take advantage of the opportunities we have."

Obaseki's prudent management of resources lifts Edo out of top 10 most indebted states in Nigeria

On the back of prudent management of scarce resources by the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led administration, Edo State is no longer on the list of top ten most indebted states in Nigeria. The Debt Management Office (DMO), in its third quarter 2022 data on the state of Nigeria's debt stock, said the country's total domestic debt stocks for all states, as of September 2022, had increased to N5.36 trillion, an increase of 128.44 billion Naira from the previous quarter's N5.28 trillion. The report listed Lagos, Delta, Ogun and Rivers State as the most indebted with N877,035,995,031.70; N272,612,510,528.95; N241,782,021,304.96 and N225,505,011,356.00 respectively.

In a statement, Special Adviser to the Edo State Governor on Media Projects, Crusoe Osagie, said the report is a testament to the accountability, transparency and the prudent management of resources by the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led government. The fifth most indebted state, according to the report by the DMO, is Akwa Ibom with N219,617,660,991.63, closely followed by Imo, Cross River, Oyo, Plateau and Bayelsa States with 207,520,959,471.52; 175,198,799,155.96; 160,071,143,937.27; 151,903,415,543.09 and 151,158,248,963.07 respectively.

According to Osagie, "The Edo State Government, under the sterling leadership of Governor Obaseki, has been very intentional in its vision to achieve economic prosperity for the state and has continued to adequately deploy all resources that accrue to the state to projects aimed at improving the livelihoods of the people.

"The recent report by the Debt Management Office is a testament to that fact. Edo State today, is witnessing an increase in Internally Generated Revenue on the back of nuanced reforms in the state to boost revenue inflow. Amid dwindling revenue from the federal government, the governor has continued to pursue life-transforming industrial and infrastructural projects and other massive developments to engender economic prosperity, leveraging private capital.

"Through the yearly Alaghodoro Summit alone, the government has attracted the inflow of over \$2 billion investments into the state, including the \$500 million attracted through the Edo State Oil Palm Programme (ESOPP). Saro Africa Group of Companies also began injecting about \$250 million in the state through its Integrated Agricultural Project. The \$10 million Edo Refinery project is another signature project. There are also investments in the technology, creative, manufacturing, food processing and energy sectors, among others.

"Edo has become a fine example of how sub-nationals can leverage public-private partnership to drive economic development and improve the livelihoods of the citizens." He added, "It has become a certainty that the huge amount of infrastructural, economic and industrial projects which Governor Obaseki churned out in these few years with such limited resources would certainly create a towering legacy that his successor will grapple with."