



# Newsletter



## We need to rebuild social contract across the region - DSG Amina Mohammed

In strengthening the African Union member states' response to terrorism in the region, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, has called on the regional body and the ECOWAS to work to rebuild the social contract across the region.

"We need to work to rebuild the social contract across the region. The social contract—the bond between people and the authorities that govern them—has been frayed by decades of underinvestment, crises, and corruption." She said at the opening session of the High-Level African Counter-Terrorism meeting organised by the Government of Nigeria with the support of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and held in Abuja Nigeria, on 22-23 April 2024. *Continue on page 2*

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United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed



United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov

The Deputy Secretary-General noted that rebuilding social contracts was essential for recovery. “It means building strong democratic institutions and promoting people-centered governance, all grounded in human rights, and guaranteed access to basic services and inclusive development for all people, no matter who they are.”

The DSG highlighted the Summit of the Future happening at the margins of this year’s General Assembly and acknowledged that it would be a crucial opportunity to reinvigorate multilateralism in key areas, including sustainable development, a digital compact, future generations, and a New Agenda for Peace.

She emphasised that “Improving our global response to terrorism must play a central role in the New Agenda for Peace, uniting different stakeholders from the security, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors behind a vision for a future without terrorism.”

Ms Mohammed called on African leaders to ensure that the institutions of the African Union and ECOWAS who are responsible to drive integration have the capacity and resources to do so.

President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu, called for the establishment of a regional Counter-Terrorism Centre that would tackle the spate of insecurity across the borders of African states.

He said the Centre will serve as a hub for intelligence sharing, operational coordination, and capacity building throughout Africa.

The president said Africa must take a comprehensive approach to combating terrorism, not only through might, but by addressing the root causes of the scourge like marginalisation, poverty, inequality, and social injustice. Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, observed that African regional initiatives seemed to be achieving results and should be supported.

“We have some regional initiatives, from the African Union Mission in Somalia to the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin, and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique. These regional arrangements require support and long-term commitment from the international community.” He said.

Voronkov emphasised that the UN Secretary-General’s policy brief on “A New Agenda for Peace” called for guaranteed funding, through assessed contributions for peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorism operations, led by African partners with a UN Security Council mandate under Chapters VII and VIII of the UN Charter.

The meeting themed, “Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institution Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism in Africa” was attended by His Excellency, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; His Excellency, Nana Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana; His Excellency, Faure Gnassingbe, President of Togo; and representatives of other member states and international organisations.



L-R: President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu; United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed; and Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov



## Let's pledge to stand as one against hatred and discrimination - Guterres



Mr Mohamed Malick Fall, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nigeria during the lighting of the candle

In commemorating the 30th year anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the UN Secretary-General Antonio GUTERRES has urged everyone to stand as one against all forms of hatred and discrimination.

In his statement on the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, marked every 7 April, and read by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Mohamed Malick Fall, at the solemn event organised by the High Commission of Rwanda in Nigeria, Guterres said, "On this solemn day of remembrance, let's pledge to stand as one against all forms of hatred and discrimination."

He urged everyone to ensure that the acts that began on April 7, 1994 are "never forgotten — and never repeated. Anywhere."

The Rwandan High Commissioner to Nigeria, Ambassador Christophe Bazivamo, called for collective fight against hate ideology and all forms of discrimination.

"Let's renew our commitment to peace and unity." He said.



Mr Mohamed Malick Fall, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nigeria and the High Commissioner of the Rwandan High Commission in Nigeria, H.E. Ambassador Christophe Bazivamo



## Escalating media action for women's empowerment



Participants during the Panel Discussion at the UN Women Media Forum. Photo: UN Women Nigeria/Oluoma Ali

In the ever-evolving landscape of gender equality and women's empowerment, the role of media stands paramount. It is both a reflection of societal norms and a powerful tool for shaping them. The UN Women Nigeria Media Forum 2024, held as a continuation of the maiden conference in 2023, aimed at leveraging media influence to advance gender equality and women's empowerment across Nigeria. The primary objective of the forum was to evaluate the gender responsiveness of media content from January to March 2024. CEOs, editors, and reporters from various media outlets convened to assess how effectively the media portrayed issues affecting women, particularly amidst economic challenges like the steep fall of the Naira. Through a gender-disaggregated analysis, the forum sought to identify areas of improvement and best practices in media reporting on gender-related issues.

In her welcome remarks, UN Women Nigeria Country Representative Ms. Beatrice Eyong highlighted the crucial role of media in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors towards gender equality. She emphasized the progress made in Nigeria, citing examples of heightened

women's representation in decision-making positions and legislative reforms supporting gender equality. Despite challenges, Ms. Eyong remained optimistic about Nigeria's trajectory towards gender equality. The event also featured a panel discussion which highlighted the critical need for media interventions to improve women's representation in politics. Panelists explored challenges such as media phobia among women and the lack of enthusiasm in political participation. They emphasized the importance of capacity-building, showcasing women's achievements, and creating supportive environments for women in politics.

In his closing remark, Zephaniah Aura, UN Women Programmes Specialist for women's political participation, reiterated the urgency of advancing women's participation in politics, noting Nigeria's lagging position in Africa. He emphasized the role of media in amplifying women's voices and called for concerted efforts to support women's political aspirations.

The UN Women Nigeria Media Forum 2024 served as a driving force for change, igniting conversations and commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment. By harnessing the power of media, stakeholders pledged to drive tangible progress, recognizing that inclusive and gender-responsive reporting is indispensable in shaping a more equitable future. As Nigeria navigates the path towards the 2027 elections and beyond, the collaboration between UN Women and media partners stands poised to drive transformative change and build a more inclusive society for all.

Attendees offered diverse perspectives, advocating for systemic changes to address barriers to women's political participation. Suggestions ranged from targeted mentorship programs to grassroots mobilization and the establishment of gender desks in media outlets. The consensus underscored the need for collective action to empower women in leadership roles.



Ms. Beatrice Eyong giving her welcome remarks at the UN Women Media Forum. Photo: UN Women Nigeria/Oluoma Ali



## UN empowers young Nigerian entrepreneurs in using IP rights for business



A cross-section of National Youth Service Corps members at the event

To equip and empower young Nigerian entrepreneurs in using IP rights for business development and financing strategy, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO Nigeria Office) organized an event at the UN House on Intellectual Property Skills Acquisition, Learning, and Youth Entrepreneurship (IP SALAYE) targeting the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Abuja.

The event is to present an opportunity for the National Youth Corp Members to exhibit their innovations to potential investors, mentors, NYSC officials and members of the entrepreneurial communities. The Corp Members in a previous workshop were equipped to advance and provide solutions to SDGs issues in their local communities and how to protect their innovations.

IPSALAYE is an IP awareness program for young entrepreneurs undergoing the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program in Nigeria, designed to: Help young entrepreneurs learn about the use of IP in fostering successful businesses.

Connect young entrepreneurs with experienced business and IP experts and celebrate success stories of young entrepreneurs that have leveraged IP for their business growth.

World Intellectual Property Organization



A cross-section of participants



WIPO Nigeria Office Director, Dr. Oluwatobiloba Moody



# UN collaboration with Japan: Empowering women in Northeast Nigeria



Group photo of H.E. Ms. Kamikawa Yoko with heads of Agencies at the UN House Photo: UN Women Nigeria/Unwana Umosen

At the meeting, UN Women Nigeria Country Representative, Ms. Beatrice Eyong, also announced enhanced cooperation with the Japanese government to advance peace and security for women in the region, aligning with UN Security Council Resolutions. This cooperation has facilitated UN Women's investment in the economic empowerment of women in Northeast Nigeria, supporting initiatives like the one spearheaded by Fati Ibrahim Bulama in Abbari community, Yobe State.

Fati Ibrahim Bulama, a 60-year-old retiree, has been a champion for peace and conflict resolution in her community. Witnessing the displacement and economic hardship faced by her fellow community members, especially women and girls, Fati took action. With support from UN Women through Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), funded by the governments of Japan and Germany, Fati received training on advocacy and sensitization for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Fati's journey began in 2021 after retiring from civil service. She established her home as a training center, dedicated to educating and empowering women and girls in the Abbari community. Her efforts have profoundly impacted her community, fostering collaboration and mutual respect among its members. Through capacity building and technical support from UN Women and PWAN, Fati has championed women's empowerment and challenged gender-based violence, offering support to victims and connecting them with necessary resources.



Bulama Fati Ibrahim in her palace together with some of her council members Photo: UN Women Nigeria

One such example is the case of a young woman Fati supported, who was a victim of abuse within her family. Through Fati's advocacy, the woman received skill acquisition training and was able to break free from the cycle of abuse, supporting herself and her children independently.

Fati's dedication to promoting peace and empowering women has not gone unnoticed. She rose through the ranks to become the first female Bulama (Ward Head) of the Abbari community, breaking patriarchal and cultural barriers. Her leadership continues to inspire others to work towards building inclusive and resilient societies where peace and justice prevails.



# FG, UN Discuss women's health and demographic dividend



UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem addresses Vice President of Nigeria, Senator Kashim Shettima and his team during her visit at the State House, Abuja

UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem and Nigeria Vice President Shettima expressed their shared commitment to addressing challenges related to women's health and well-being during a courtesy visit by Dr Natalia Kanem and UNFPA delegation to the Vice President. They also committed to implementing effective strategies to improve women's health and well-being.

Dr. Kanem was in Nigeria for the regional launch of the State of World Population Report 2024, which highlights the progress made since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. During the meeting, Dr. Kanem expressed her admiration for Nigeria's efforts in uplifting women and girls and recognized the country as a worthy example.

She emphasized UNFPA's commitment to removing the burdens faced by women and girls, particularly through initiatives like training midwives. She also underscored the importance of ensuring that no woman loses her life while giving birth. The executive director also emphasized the importance of accurate censuses to enhance demographic dividend and ensure inclusive development.

Speaking about Nigeria's population, Shettima acknowledged its projected growth, stating that with a median age of 16.9 years old, by 2050 Nigeria is expected to become the most populous nation on earth.

He expressed Nigeria's identification with the goals set forth by UNFPA and commended the impact of the organisation towards Nigeria country office stating: "Even in the darker times of the insurgency, UNFPA did not run away." The State of the World Report (SWOP) 2024 was launched on April 24th in Abuja and highlights that over half of preventable maternal deaths occur in countries affected by crises and conflicts.

It also found significant disparities faced by African women who according to statistics, experience a 130 times higher risk of maternal deaths compared to their counterparts in Europe and Northern America. The report brings attention to the higher maternal mortality rates among women of African descent in the Americas, as well as the increased vulnerability faced by indigenous women and women with disabilities.

Gender-based violence was also identified as a critical issue affecting individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions. Also in attendance at the meeting was National Population Commission members. NPC chairman Nasir Isa Kwarra attested to the strong collaboration between UNFPA and the commission.



UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem



# UN unveils State of World Population Report 2024 in regional launch in Nigeria



Dr Ali Pate, the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, representing the President of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu, at the launch of the report, alongside the Executive Director of UNFPA.

*The State of the World Report 2024: "Interwoven Lives, Threads of Hope: Ending Inequalities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" was unveiled in Abuja by UNFPA executive director, Dr Natalia Kanem and Nigerian authorities during a regional launch event that gathered around 300 high-level guests at the Presidential Villa Banquet Hall.*

Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu was represented by the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Ali Pate. During his opening address on behalf of the president, he said that the theme comes with a "narrative that reminds us that, globally we are composed of eight billion threads of hope- eight billion people interwoven with each of the threads being very unique." "The regional inauguration of the 2024 SWOP report in Nigeria and the presence of the UNFPA Executive Director, is a reminder that Nigeria should prioritise data generation to provide the baseline and showcase progress towards the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," he said. "We are consulting and working closely with the National Population Commission (NPC) to get this exercise right. We count on the support of UNFPA and other partners to get it right," he added.

Nigeria is among the eight identified countries to account for more than half of the projected increase in the world population up to 2050.



UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem

The other countries are Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania. In her address, Dr Kanem said the report presents important data which shows that in many countries, inequalities in such key measures as access to health care have been reduced. In other places however, disparities are widening, and inequalities still persist everywhere.

"The report highlights that since global measurements have been kept, two countries – India and Nigeria – have recorded the highest number of maternal deaths. The remarkable reduction in the number of women worldwide dying in childbirth, 34 per cent since 2000 is largely attributable to progress in those two countries. Nigeria's achievement in reducing the maternal death rate by more than 11 per cent between 2013 and 2018 must be applauded", she said.

Kanem also said that there have been advances in combatting gender-based violence and harmful practices, adding that in Nigeria, there has been a 10 per cent drop in adolescents subjected to female genital mutilation in the past decade. Progress has also been made as the proportion of women serving in parliaments has more than doubled globally, however, that progress is slowing down, while by many measures it has stalled completely. She noted that since 2016, the world has made zero progress in saving women from preventable deaths in pregnancy and childbirth.

"One important reason, our report shows, is that we have not prioritised reaching those furthest behind. We see, for example, that barriers to health care fell fastest for women who are more affluent, educated and privileged. Many of these findings are the result of having better data than ever before. Thirty years ago, maternal mor-



tality rates were only rough estimates," she said. "Today, data allow us to see clearly the unacceptable rates at which women are dying while giving life; data also show the inequalities that are quite literally killing them," added Dr Kanem.

Speaking about the Maternal Mortality Rate in Nigeria, she said that in spite of the progress recorded, it still remained high at over 1,047 per 100,000 live births. Kanem however, pledged UNFPA support for the country to change that statistic. Later the Banquet Hall came alive thanks to the vibrant troupe of dancers whose rhythmic drumming and energetic performances set the tone for the event.

Amidst the palpable excitement, Seyi Bolaji, a young activist from Stand with a Girl initiative representing young people at the regional launch, took the stage, her impassioned chants of "For the Youth" resonating throughout the room, stirring up a wave of enthusiasm. Her powerful words ignited a fire within the audience, emphasizing the importance of youth empowerment and inclusion. The unveiling ceremony lasted two hours, leaving a lasting impression of solidarity and commitment to advancing the rights and well-being of young people worldwide.



Cultural display during the launch



A Group photograph of dignitaries displaying the State of World Population Report 2024



## Korea, UN launch the Better Education for Africa's Rise (BEAR III) project in Abuja



(Middle) Professor Tahir Mamman Minister of Education, Nigeria and High Level Representatives of the BEAR III countries launched the Better Education for Africa's Rise (BEAR III) at the UN House Abuja. (Left) WHO Nigeria Country Representative and The Resident Coordinator ai, Dr Walter Mulombo (Right) UNESCO Country Representative Mr. Abdourahamane Diallo

The Better Education for Africa's Rise (BEAR III) project - a joint initiative between UNESCO and the Republic of Korea aiming has been launched.

The project aims to strengthen Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems in West Africa; increase the skills and employability of young people in Africa, including women and disadvantaged groups to drive economic growth and build peaceful societies.

The Resident Coordinator ai, and WHO Nigeria Country Representative Dr Walter Mulombo in his address at the event highlighted the importance of promoting multidimensional response to meaningfully engage young people to provide them with a better chance of accessing decent employment and creating self-employment, while also improving their social-economic growth and stressed that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a propeller of knowledge and skills development that can deliver the 'Africa we.

UNESCO Country Representative Mr. Abdourahamane Diallo in his welcome remarks said, 'closing the skill gaps in the informal sector is key for promoting inclusive growth and giving chances to young people in Africa by offering opportunities for skilling, upskilling and reskilling to Africa's dynamic labor market.'

He gave assurance of UNESCO's unwavering support to bridging education which is critical to changing workforce by advancing the life and career skills of the growing youth population.



Professor Tahir Mamman, Minister of Education



UNESCO Country Representative Mr. Abdourahamane Diallo



# UN advises youth to be more innovative towards achieving the 2030 SDGs goals targets



A cross-section of participants at the event.

The ECOSOC Youth Forum 2024 engagement held at the UN House in Abuja and organised by the UN Nigeria Inter-Agency Group on Youth is centered around shaping sustainable and innovative solutions, reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crisis. The UNDP Representative Ms Elsie Attafuah, represented by Chiedu Nwokolo in her address, urged youths to be more innovative towards achieving the SDGs targets for meaningful change.

The panel discussion highlighted SDGs 1, 2, 8, 13 and 17 and called on young people to leverage on the digital space, seize opportunities, and emphasized holding governments accountable and stressed that with innovative solutions, the young people will be able to shift the tides to achieve the Global Goals.

Participants exchanged ideas on how youth can drive change through innovative approaches and community engagement. The forum urged Nigerian youth to step up, take action, and lead the change towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.





## Water 'fuels' small Women-run enterprises in Sokoto community



*As clean water flows from the solar-motorized borehole in Kindiru village, small businesses operated by women in the community are adding to their income as they gradually push for expansion.*

“I used to trek for about two hours just to get water from a faraway community. It affected my business,” Fadminatu said. “Now, it takes me less than three minutes to get safer, cleaner water.”

Fadminatu is one of the small but growing number of women in Kindiru village, who are leveraging the ease of water supply from a newly installed solar-motorized borehole in the community. The young woman, who dropped out of school at the primary level, took over the business of selling Kunu, a local drink, from her mother a few years ago. The business almost caved, due to their inability to source water easily.

During the hot season (January–May), when the few hand dug wells in the community dry up, the villagers, left with no option, would trek to Dange, about three kilometers away, to buy water from private bore-

holes. Men who could afford to get water from Dange using motorcycles and survived the brutal summer, but the majority of poor households made this journey on their donkeys and cattle.

The installation of the solar motorized borehole in Kindiru, which is located in Dange Shuni Local Government Area of Sokoto State, flipped this situation on its head. A life-changing water project in Kindiru was executed by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as part of Improved Sustainability of Integrated WASH Services (IWASH) intervention.

“The borehole has made water accessible to everyone. It is cleaner and better than the one we used to fetch from the well after trekking for about two hours. Because of the water, my daily profit has tripled. I used to make N300 daily, but now with water available to produce more, the profit has jumped to about N1, 000” Fadminatu beamed.

The potable and safe water from water kiosk (Shagon ruwa) attached to the borehole, is sold for N10 for 20 liters, as against N30 in private-owned boreholes in far-away Dangi.

This (USAID) collaboration with the (UNICEF) intervention, which cut across the 3 North West states of Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara, has continued to positively impact vulnerable households and empower women running small businesses.





Like Fadmitu, 50-year-old Aisha Musa, has also witnessed a surge in her mamsa (rice cake) outlet. Aisha who has been baking for almost 30 years, has recently seen her daily sales shoot up from N2000 to between N3000 and N5,000.

Aisha knows, the secret to this small but meaningful success lies in Water. "Before the establishment of the bore hole in this community, I was not making enough masa to meet demands because getting water was difficult, but now with clean water at my doorstep, I am almost doubling production" Aisha said.

Apart from doubling production, Aisha says she is also planning to employ a few young women into the business so that they can have access to income as well as learn the trade.

"I want to bring some women into the business, they can learn the business and also make good money from it to support their families, just like I now do. With the issue of water now taken care of, it won't be a difficult task for anyone. I learned this trade years ago, and I also want to pass it on to the younger generation," she said.

This targeted USAID-UNICEF partnered intervention has given life and hope to this 1000-member water starved community, which was always in the news for being a hotspot in Sokoto State for waterborne diseases like cholera and diarrhea. Today Sokoto and its women are making headlines for all the right reasons.





## “We count people because people count”: UN reiterates importance of census to Nigeria”



UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem (7th from right) in a group photograph with other dignitaries

UNFPA Executive Director, Dr Natalia Kanem, reiterated the importance of Nigeria conducting the Population and Housing Census during a meeting with the Chairman of the National Population Commission (NPC), Hon. Nasir Kwarra during her visit to Abuja for the regional inauguration of the 2024 State of World Population (SWOP) Report.

The report highlights the significant disparities faced by African women, who experience a 130 times higher risk of maternal deaths compared to their counterparts in Europe and Northern America. The report also found that over half of preventable maternal deaths occur in countries affected by crises and conflicts, and there are higher maternal mortality rates among women of African descent in the Americas, as well as the increased vulnerability faced by indigenous women and women with disabilities. Gender-based violence was also identified as a critical issue affecting individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions.

The report was launched on April 24th in Abuja and highlights the progress made, but also the work left to be done since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. During the meeting with Kwarra, Kanem said it was important to “count everyone because everyone counts.” “Population data is going

to make it easier for the district person and local governments to be able to manage and understand ‘where does this adolescent girl live? How can we bring the school closer to her doorstep?’,” said Kanem.

“Population is not just numbers, it is people - and this is what the people of the commission represent.” Kanem commended the long-standing partnership and collaboration the fund and the commission. She also urged the commission to continue to advocate for adolescent girls who are not only falling pregnant but dying in maternal mortality statistics. She urged the commissioners to figure out how to speak to the men and women in their states to protect the lives of the adolescent girls and encourage them to finish their education.

“That is the magic bullet. If every girl finishes her secondary school education, the economy prospers, the family also prospers,” said the UNFPA executive director. In turn Kwarra pointed out UNFPA’s continued support for the nation’s population policy is appreciated as it will enable the nation to strengthen its capacity for data-driven decision-making and evidence-based policymaking.



## Finding home again: A journey of renewal



Sekou Kaba happy to have finally returned home after 13 years

“Home sweet home,” muses 31-year-old Sekou Kaba, his eyes alight with a mix of nostalgia and hope as he finalizes his preparations to return to Ivory Coast. After a tumultuous journey that saw him seeking refuge first in Benin and then in Nigeria, Sekou is ready to rebuild his life in his homeland, armed with new skills and a deeper understanding of the world.

Sekou's ordeal started in 2011 during the war in Ivory Coast. The relentless sound of gunshots forced him to flee his home. His initial refuge in Benin was short-lived; just a year later, a chance encounter with a friend revealed that his family had found sanctuary in Nigeria. Arriving in Lagos in 2012, Sekou was reunited with his family. They were living under cramped conditions, sharing a single room with another refugee family on Adeniji Lagos Island.

"The language barrier was a formidable obstacle. I couldn't speak or understand English at first. But with determination and the support of my new community, I started learning the language. Over five months, I gradually improved my communication skills. I even attended adult classes to enhance my proficiency," he says.

When refugees arrive, UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, helps the government register and verify their data to ensure that family units receive comprehensive documentation together. The process helps keep families together and assists in reuniting separated children with their families. It also ensures access to vital services such as hospitals, schools, and employment opportunities.

Life in Nigeria was challenging, yet it was filled with gradual victories. Sekou's mother received financial support from UNHCR, to start a business selling beverages, which provided some stability for the family. When she could afford it, she rented a separate room, offering the family a bit more space. UNHCR's support extended to Sekou's siblings as well, who were able to continue their education through financial assistance.

Sekou initially found work in a sculpture studio, earning meagre daily wages as a cleaner. After his mother's death in 2019, he transitioned

to driving ride-hailing taxis to better support himself and his siblings. That same year, his siblings chose to return to Ivory Coast, assisted by the generosity of fellow refugees and friends.

Following the cessation of refugee status for Ivorians, Sekou made the decision to voluntarily return to Ivory Coast. With the knowledge and skills he had acquired in Nigeria, Sekou is eager to apply them positively in his country. He has learned to live with people from diverse nationalities, cultures, tribes, and religions, respecting their opinions and beliefs. This enriched perspective fuels his optimism and plans for the future.

UNHCR continues to support voluntary repatriation and reintegration through return packages, which include transportation support and cash grants. The cash grant helps to cover the needs for shelter, food and other basic needs for at least three months, as well as costs related to the issuance of civil and identity documents and for the recognition of diplomas and certificates.

Upon his return, Sekou is planning to start a business in the clothing trade, aiming not only to provide for his family but also to create employment opportunities for others. "I've learned that at home, with the same effort, you can achieve more because of the support system," he shares, encouraging other refugees who can return home to do so.

The generosity of donors continues to be invaluable in navigating the complexities of protecting, assisting, and finding solutions for forced displacement in Nigeria. Flexible funding is key, enabling responses to underfunded and protracted situations that often go unnoticed by the broader public. Sekou's story is just one of many that underscore the vital importance of sustained international solidarity, ensuring that refugees have the opportunities they need to rebuild their lives effectively.

As he prepares for his departure, he reflects on the journey ahead. "Though my time in Nigeria was punctuated by some hardships, it was also a place of growth and resilience. It's bittersweet to leave, but I know that returning home is the next step in making a meaningful impact," Sekou concludes shortly before departing for "home sweet home".



# Stitching resilience from displacement to empowerment

- By Francis Garibba, Maiduguri



As a trained tailor, life has turned around for Safiya Musa (centre) and her family. @UNHCR/Francis Garriba.

Safiya Musa lives in the heart of Musari, a bustling host community in the Borno State capital of Maiduguri. As a tailor, her products have found eager buyers as far away as N'Djamena in Chad and Mora in Far North Cameroon. Today, her life is a stark contrast to the eight years she spent in the Teachers Village Camp for internally displaced people, where she and many others sought refuge amid the humanitarian crisis in North East Nigeria.

Originally from Gamboru Ngala, Safiya's life took a tragic turn in 2014 when non-state armed groups attacked her village. The violence not only destroyed her home but also claimed the lives of her parents. Together with her husband and two children, Safiya fled to Maroua camp in Cameroon.

Confronted with severe shortages of water, food, and shelter at the camp, Safiya and her family decided to return to Nigeria a year later and were hosted at Teachers Village Camp in Maiduguri. "After we fled the village, I was greatly traumatized because my parents were killed during the attack. I also lost contact with my two sisters and brother, who fled in their own direction until we later met in the camp in Maiduguri," Safiya recounts.

In North East Nigeria, more than 2.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes due to conflicts. UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, is working closely with the Nigerian government to implement various initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of forced displacement and providing assistance to those in need.

When Teachers Village Camp was closed in 2022, Safiya and her family chose to remain in Maiduguri rather than return to their ancestral

home in Gamboru Ngala, citing security concerns. As more internally displaced people decide to stay in urban settings following camp closures, comprehensive support programmes become crucial.

Safiya was identified for assistance during a vulnerability screening conducted by UNHCR partner, the Grassroots Initiative for Strengthening Community Resilience (GISCOR). She was selected for a training programme that offered more than skill acquisition; it was a gateway to personal empowerment and a safety net against the vulnerabilities that forced displacement had imposed on her and her family.

The training honed Safiya's skills in tailoring, business development, and financial literacy. This multifaceted approach not only equipped her with the necessary skills to start a business but also offered a sense of security and stability, empowering her to navigate the complexities of her new economic and social environment. She also received a sewing machine of her choice, working tools, and a start-up package to kickstart her business.

Safiya's tailoring business has become a cornerstone of her family's financial stability and has allowed her to engage more deeply with her community. The training provided a protective net, safeguarding her from exploitation and further economic hardship, and instilled in her a confidence that has been transformative.

"The tailoring business has settled us here in Maiduguri," Safiya reflects. "We can only go back to Gamboru Ngala when safety, security, and full life return to the area."



This empowerment extends beyond her immediate family. Safiya's shop has become a local hub where she employs and trains other IDPs, particularly women, thereby extending the safety net provided by her training to others within her community. This ripple effect of empowerment and protection highlights the success of UNHCR's strategy to link humanitarian aid with long-term outcomes.

Today, as she operates her sewing machine with skilled hands and dexterity, Safiya is surrounded by apprentices eager to learn and create a new future for themselves. This scene is a powerful reminder of the potential impact of such comprehensive intervention.

As UNHCR, in collaboration with the government, continues to work closely with humanitarian and development partners, the story of Safiya emphasizes the critical importance of increasing and maintaining support for these initiatives. With millions of people displaced, the scope of need is extensive, and the potential for positive change is enormous. Empowering forcibly displaced people to shift from relying on aid to becoming productive members of their local economies is essential.

## Northeastern Nigeria: Anticipatory actions to prevent farming families from losing crops to flooding



One of the many dykes built to prevent flooding of farm lands in Dachia community of Adamawa State, Nigeria Photo: ©FAO/ David Tsokar

“Two years ago, I planted two bags of rice seed, but the floods washed away the entire field, I could not even get seeds to plant during the following season. Then came flood alerts, warning us of the imminent disaster. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) also introduced the construction of dykes to control the movement of water. I was able to harvest 95 bags of rice paddy at the end of the season”.

Balan Gombe, 55 and father of 14, is one of the hundreds of farmers living in the Dansin Hausa community, in Fufore local government area, Adamawa state, northeastern Nigeria. As most farmers there, he cultivates his rice farms by the bank of the Gongola River that traverses part of the village and offloads into the larger Benue River. Flooding is not new to community members, yet every year, they suffer huge losses mainly due to the absence of reliable weather forecast. This changed in early 2023, when FAO put in place Anticipatory Actions, including flood alerts.

To safeguard the critical livelihoods assets, such as crops and livestock, of communities living in areas prone to severe flooding, FAO implemented the project entitled “Anticipatory Action for flood risk in the Sahel”, thanks to funding from Germany through the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities. In northeastern Nigeria, project activities were carried out in Adamawa and Yobe states.

A strategic solution to a complex challenge

The project aimed to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable farming communities against forecast floods through early warning, early actions measures to be put in place before the disaster, such as the construction of dykes along the river bank and flooding areas to protect people's livelihoods and productive assets.

Gombe cultivates rice every year, but often when the river overflows most of it is washed away; 2022 was the worst year for him, “I could not even recover the seeds to plant for the following season, I lost everything”. With the support received through the project, Gombe planted in March, “by May I tilled the rice, by June the waters had



started rising up, that was when FAO started engaging us in the construction of dykes with sacks filled with sand. Some people that came to help us laughed at what we were doing, but we never stopped”.

“As the water from the river continued to rise, it never got to my farm. Because whenever the water rose to the level of the dykes, it receded to its banks. The rains became heavier in June and by September, when the water started rising uncontrollably and overtook the dykes, we had already harvested in August. And I obtained my 95 bags of rice”, he said with a spark in his eyes.

“Thanks to the Anticipatory Actions put in place, we were prepared this time”, said the head of village, Dansin Hausa Shittu Ahmadu. “We were trained on constructing dykes that served as a temporary barrier against floods. It withheld the waters for some time, during which people were able to evacuate their livestock and other critical assets ahead of time. This minimized the losses we had previously experienced.”

Maimuna Mohammed, 30, testified that the early warning radio announcement was useful, “quite a number of animals were saved, and the few that were lost were not as many as in previous years”, she said. Amina Adamu, mother of eight, said whenever floods take place, many livestock and crops are lost, “but this year, information was broadcasted on the radio and we received timely flood alerts on our phones, so we planted earlier and by the time the floods came, we had already harvested, even more than what we expected. Also, we were losing

about 1 000 animals almost every time it flooded, and this year we lost about a 100, but mostly owned by people who did not take the warning seriously”, she said.

#### Protecting the livelihoods of affected communities

In addition to the dissemination of early warning information, the project trained participants on post-harvest storage options and provided Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage bags. It also distributed seeds and fertilizer to boost crop production, while livestock owners received mineral licks, groundnut hay and cowpea husk to feed their animals in case fields were flooded or while waiting for harvests.

Amina Musa, mother of nine, lives in Ribadu community and said that the feed was particularly helpful, “we learned that we can feed cows and goats with groundnut hay and husk; before, we would consider it waste and burned it. It is good animal feed and our animals love it. My goats are doing very well”, she noted.

Overall, by scaling up the dissemination of early warning messaging and risk awareness along with the timely provision of agricultural and livestock production support, FAO was able to mitigate the impact of flooding on the livelihoods and food security of vulnerable communities.



## Photo News



### Photo news captions,

1. UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mohamed Malik Fall (Left) receives the Governor of Plateau State, H.E. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang at the UN House Abuja.
2. L-R: DG of Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) Engr Clement Nze; Representative of DG Agriculture, Hydrology and Meteorology Research Center (AGRHYMET) Dr Hamadoun Mahalmoudou ; DG of Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) Prof Charles Anosike; Honourable Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development Festus Keyamo SAN CON; National Officer of WMO Dr Roland Abah; and Representative of ECOWAS at the Regional Forum Workshop on Seasonal Forecasts of Agro-hydro-climatic characteristics of the rainy season for the Sudanian and Sahelian zones of West Africa and the Sahel (PRESASS), on Friday, 26th April 2024, Reiz Continental Hotel Abuja.
3. L - R: UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Mohamed Malik Fall; Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov; and the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed



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