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Reaching Out
U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria James F. Entwistle visited Cross River state December 14-17 on a rare diplomatic visit, touring one of Africa’s oldest tropical rainforest ecosystems.

Demonstrating U.S. support for Nigeria’s efforts to preserve its forests and combat poaching and wildlife trafficking, Ambassador Entwistle toured the Drill Ranch on Afikpo Mountain and the 4,000-square kilometer Cross River National Park.

At the two biodiversity hotspots, the Ambassador engaged government officials, park rangers, and environmentally-focused NGOs like Pandirillus and the Wildlife Conservation Society on exploring ways of helping the federal and state governments further promote conservation and stop the illicit trade in wildlife.

While recognizing the importance and urgency of combating wildlife trafficking, Ambassador Entwistle delivered a wildlife conservation speech at the American Corner in Calabar and underscored the U.S. government’s commitment to taking positive measures in addressing the global challenge of climate change.

“We hope to expand our cooperation in joint training, technical exchanges, information sharing, and public education on promoting conservation, while combating poaching and wildlife trafficking here in Nigeria,” Ambassador Entwistle said at the public event that included 200 university students, faculty, state officials, and NGO representatives.

“The U.S. government, through our Fish and Wildlife Service, has been a long-time partner of the Wildlife Conservation Society, providing $1.25 million over the past five years to promote conservation of the rare primate species that call this region home,” he added.

During the visit, Ambassador Entwistle granted an exclusive interview to EbonyLife TV, “Africa’s first Global Black Entertainment and Lifestyle network.” The Ambassador underscored the mutual cooperation between the United States and Nigeria, highlighted the Young African Leaders Initiative, and discussed the U.S. presidential campaigns.

To conclude his visit to Cross River, Ambassador Entwistle toured a facility currently under construction in Calabar by General Electric (GE), a U.S. corporation, and met with the firm’s executive management. GE is investing $250 million in the facility, which will manufacture equipment for the oil and gas industry and will create 300 new jobs and more than 1,000 jobs indirectly through the more than 50 new suppliers who will support expanded operations. The company will provide one-year to four-year training programs for engineers, welders, fabricators, and machinists in what will become one of the firm’s biggest investments in sub-Saharan Africa.
Dear CROSSROADS Readers,

Let me begin by wishing everyone a happy and prosperous 2016. In 2015, the United States and Nigeria worked together to strengthen humanitarian relief efforts. As a team, we worked to improve the lives of the victims of Boko Haram. In 2016, we will continue our partnership to ease their suffering.

In 2015, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided $78.5 million in support of humanitarian and transitional activities in northeastern Nigeria. This included an innovative emergency food assistance program. Rather than distribute food directly, USAID and its partners provided electronic cash transfers and food vouchers. This change empowers individuals to purchase nutritious foods from selected vendors in local markets, which helps the local economy to recover as well. The United States also supports the humanitarian work of various United Nations organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross in northeast Nigeria.

Similarly, U.S. private companies are playing a major role in assisting displaced Nigerians. For example, the Procter & Gamble donations (featured on page 8) represent some of the contributions that the U.S. private sector made this past year to Nigeria’s relief efforts. I applaud UNICEF’s involvement in distributing these basic care products that are improving the lives of thousands of Nigerians in tough circumstances.

Looking at the broader picture, these collaborations show what is possible when the private sector engages with a host country and its people to promote social responsibility. Their endeavors are not driven solely by profit, but also by a desire to support ongoing efforts by the Nigerian government, the international community, and most importantly, by the Nigerian people to bring comfort to their fellow citizens. This edition captures that collective effort to bring relief and comfort to displaced people in Nigeria. I hope you enjoy it.

Ambassador James F. Entwistle

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Nothing better illustrates the adage, “teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime,” than the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) micro-enterprise training that teaches internally displaced persons (IDPs) the basics of handling money and running a profitable business. This is one of the various innovative programs of the U.S. government to assist the Government of Nigeria in providing relief to those most affected by Boko Haram’s insurgency—to those forced to relocate, to those who have lost family and friends, to those who have lost nearly everything they once had.

On November 25, the U.S. Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission, Maria Brewer, visited the Kuchingoro IDP settlement in Abuja. Many people may be surprised to learn that a settlement for IDPs exists right in Nigeria’s capital. As Brewer said, “Whether it’s in Abuja or the northeast, there is no question that the insurgency has dramatically affected the lives of millions of Nigerians.”

Kuchingoro is a settlement of hundreds of persons displaced from northeastern Nigeria by the Boko Haram insurgency. Many have not seen their homes in years and have little hope of returning in the near term. USAID’s MARKET II micro-enterprise training teaches basic small business skills to IDP settlement residents to help them begin to generate an income stream and rebuild a level of independence.

About 2 million people live in settlements all across the country as a result of Boko Haram’s reign of terror. Some are brand new camps and some, like the one in Kuchingoro, were established about two years ago. While at the Kuchingoro camp, Brewer witnessed Nigerian families, whom with the help of USAID programs, showing resilience and finding ways to make ends meet.

She reassured the IDPs of America’s concerns and readiness to help. “As a friend of the Nigerian people, the United States stands ready to help you overcome what may appear to be an insurmountable obstacle,” Brewer said. “What I have observed here today is that while...
you may have been displaced, you
certainly have not been defeated,”
she added.

Brewer toured the USAID’s MARKETS II micro-enterprise
classes teaching entrepreneurship
skills. She observed simulated
business sessions and visited two
thriving small businesses. Small
businesses, such as Ladi Matthias’s
“akara” stand or Genesis Musa’s
convenience shop, are helping
people in the Kuchingoro IDP camp
rebuild their lives and rebuild their
communities.

In the northeast, the U.S.
government has provided millions
dollars in health services, food
vouchers, basic necessities, and
medical care. The U.S. government
has also helped repair schools and
offered support to get children back
into school.

Volunteers from the U.S.
Consulate General in
Lagos, working with local
government, business, and NGO
partners, provided medical assistance
in October to the people of the
impoverished community of Makoko
during a month-long series of medical
outreach. The events included a free
clinic to provide basic health screening
and evaluation, first aid, health
education, medical consultations, and
culminated with the screening and
treatment of breast and cervical cancer.

This community service
was made possible through the J.
Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust,
a charitable fund established in the
memory of a late U.S. diplomat.
Each year, the trust solicits unofficial,
voluntary proposals for funding
conceived by U.S. diplomats from
around the world. Since 2008, U.S.
Consulate General Lagos has secured
funding for health, education, and economic development projects. A generous donation from the Coca-Cola Corporation allowed the project to double the number of patients seen and treated.

The Makoko community was selected for this project because of its limited access to medical resources. Some estimates claim that up to 100,000 people live in the impoverished stilt villages of Makoko, but have no government health centers, clinics, or hospitals. The closest primary health center is located five kilometers away.

The outreach program began by bringing a free health clinic to the people. Volunteers from the U.S. Consulate collected patients’ biographical information and vital signs, including height, weight, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, and blood glucose levels, before sending them forward to consult with the medical team. A team of Nigerian and American doctors and nurses evaluated the patients to determine their basic medical needs. Treatment was provided on-site, when possible, and other problems that could not be addressed were referred to local clinics.

The Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development reached out to community leaders to generate awareness leading up to the clinic. The event also caught the attention of Senator Oluremi Tinubu of Lagos State, who addressed patients in both English and Yoruba on the importance of preventative medical care. Over 500 Nigerians were eventually seen and treated.

Next, the project aimed to identify the early stages of breast and cervical cancer. The George Kerry Life Foundation, a Nigerian NGO focused on combating non-communicable diseases, worked with U.S. Consulate volunteers to screen over 200 women for breast and cervical cancer. Cervical cancer alone kills an estimated 9,000 Nigerian women each year—that’s one Nigerian woman every hour! Fortunately, both forms of cancer can be treated if detected early. The pre-cancerous stage can last between five and 30 years and is the best time to stop the disease. By the time symptoms begin to show, it is often too late as the cancer has already spread to other organs, which is why it is important to get screened early. Sixteen cases were detected in Makoko during the outreach program. All of the cases were detected early enough to be treated successfully.

The work carried out by volunteers from the U.S. Consulate is just one small piece of an ongoing partnership with the Nigerian people. A committee is already discussing how the J. Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust can be used to improve the community next year.
Being an internally displaced person (IDP) fleeing for your life is bad enough; but being a female on the run with seven children between one month and 13 years is unfathomable. In 2013, then 33-year-old Ladi Mathias found herself in this unimaginable position.

Ladi reflected how her husband had to leave her village before their last child was born because Boko Haram was targeting men. “It was so hard given my condition [pregnant] and our other six children, but I knew it was for the best,” stated Ladi. Her husband went to Kuchingoro camp in Abuja to save his life.

A month after the birth of her only daughter, the worst happened—armed insurgents attacked their village of Ngoshe in the Gwoza Local Governance Area of Borno State. Ladi survived the attack and fled to the nearby hills with her children and other villagers. The insurgents followed, so survivors walked for miles to a camp in Cameroon. There, they encountered a cholera outbreak.

Ladi remembers, “If I did not lose my children to Boko Haram, I was not going to sit around and watch them die from cholera.” She heard that Adamawa State back in Nigeria was safer.

Walking to Adamawa was not easy. “My seven children made it almost impossible to make any progress, but a good Samaritan sympathized and paid our transport to Adamawa.”

In June 2014, she and her children finally arrived in Abuja. “Reuniting with my husband was a blessing for my family. For a moment, I forgot all my suffering because finally I could face them with my husband,” she says. She added that although they barely had any food, they were happy to be alive.

Ladi’s experience is one of many witnessed in northern Nigeria, especially in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, where Boko Haram attacks were prevalent. These attacks resulted in displaced persons settling in various camps across the country. The USAID-supported Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises (MARKETS II) program carried out assessments of IDP training needs to determine how best to respond. It resulted in the development of an innovative, cross-cutting training activity integrating micro-enterprise development and best practices in nutrition and hygiene.

“I do not have a perfect life, but I certainly have a better one. It could have been worse, but this project made it smooth. I will take one step at a time and I know eventually I will get where I want to be,” Ladi said. The micro-enterprise fundamentals training has given hope to IDPs like Ladi. She learned how to manage a small business, provide affordable balanced meals for her family, and practice proper hygiene and sanitation to avoid illness. Before becoming displaced, Ladi was selling akara (soybean cake) and ground nuts in Borno state. The USAID training inspired her to revive her business in the camp. One of the trainers saw her determination and gave her $10 of his own money as start-up capital for her now thriving akara business.

Ladi was used to being given money and food by camp visitors, so she was disappointed to hear that the USAID program was there to provide training. However, she now says that what she was given was more valuable than any of the things she has ever received. “Before the training, I didn’t know anything about profit or capital. I would just sell and use all the money, sometimes forgetting to keep some for restocking,” she explained. The training gave her the skills needed to keep records and save, which motivated her to open a bank account. Twice a month, she calculates her profits and deposits her savings.

Ladi’s profits are now $65-75, and she saves $50, contributes $5 in church, and uses the rest for family maintenance. Back in Borno, her business made more akara, but only a quarter of the profit she earns now. Read more at: http://1.usa.gov/1V0LrXr
When we think of refugees, the image that most often comes to mind is persons fleeing their country and seeking safety within another country. Whether that image be the recent Syrian refugees entering European countries or lost boys of Sudan coming to the United States during the second Sudanese civil war, the people who are often forgotten are those who are not able to leave their home countries as they attempt to flee violent conflicts. The term used to describe these people is internally displaced persons (IDPs). The current conflict in Nigeria involving attacks by Boko Haram has brought to light the plight of IDPs in Nigeria.

As of April 2015, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organization based in Norway, estimated that 1.5 million people who have been forced to flee their homes in Nigeria are still living in internal displacement. This figure includes people displaced as a result of brutal attacks by members of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria and ongoing inter-communal clashes.

Throughout 2015, alumni of the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program and staff of the Iowa Resource for International Students (IRIS) organization in Nigeria recognized this crisis and the hardships these people face and wanted to do something. In three different states—Kaduna, Bauchi, and Benue—YES alumni found ways to help IDPs weather these hardships and have brought hope to those who felt hopeless.

In Kaduna, YES alumni provided much needed hygiene supplies to the overcrowded Mando refugee camp and spoke to women and young adults on the importance of sanitation and personal hygiene. The alumni joined them in cleaning areas of the camp and distributed donated items including food, soaps, candies, and clothing to the women and children.

In Bauchi, YES alumni organized a project called “The Good Deed” to reach out to IDPs. Over the past few years, thousands of families have been forced out of their homes and communities in northeastern Nigeria and have been living in rural camps in this state since. They lack basic necessities, especially the women and children who dominate the camps. The YES alumni contacted young people through the secondary schools within the city of Bauchi, soliciting donations of food, clothes, shoes, and money. Within a couple of days, students and alumni gathered hundreds of donations, which were distributed to nearly 200 people.

In Benue, YES alumni not only assisted IDPs by providing donated relief materials, such as anti-malarial drugs, hygiene materials, detergents, food items, and soccer balls for recreation, but also worked with a group of psychotherapists to counsel the women, men, and children dealing with post-traumatic stress. The therapists engaged with the internally displaced persons, especially children, to provide them reassurance that things will get better and to instill hope they will return to their homes in the near future.

Helping Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria

Adapted from the IRIS Blog

When we think of refugees, the image that most often comes to mind is persons fleeing their country and seeking safety within another country. Whether that image be the recent Syrian refugees entering European countries or lost boys of Sudan coming to the United States during the second Sudanese civil war, the people who are often forgotten are those who are not able to leave their home countries as they attempt to flee violent conflicts. The term used to describe these people is internally displaced persons (IDPs). The current conflict in Nigeria involving attacks by Boko Haram has brought to light the plight of IDPs in Nigeria.

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Read more at http://bit.ly/1PgZrMK
Consumer goods manufacturing company Procter & Gamble (P&G) Nigeria is supporting Nigerians displaced by the conflict in the northeast with a donation of hygiene products and personal care items.

UNICEF Nigeria is distributing the donation of sanitary pads, baby diapers, toothpaste, batteries, and detergent. These items will help improve hygiene and basic comfort for the internally displaced in Borno State.

During a handover ceremony at the U.S. Embassy in Abuja on November 27, 2015, Procter & Gamble Managing Director George Nassar presented samples of the products to a National Assembly Representative of Borno State, M.T. Monguno.

“Our mission is to touch and improve the personal health and well-being of Nigerians,” Nassar said. “This donation will help to meet some of the basic requirements of those who most need our support. We chose to work with UNICEF as it has a proven reputation in working with partners to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, and disease can cause,” he added.

“We thank Procter & Gamble for this generous donation,” said UNICEF Nigeria Representative Jean Gough at the handover ceremony. “It will make a big difference in the lives of the displaced in Borno, who struggle daily for basic necessities. We hope it will also help to inspire Nigerians to support those less fortunate in their country.”

In accepting the donation on behalf of Borno, Rep. Monguno said, “This gift is very welcome and is very timely in view of the needs of the IDPs. This is a clear demonstration of international support for the victims of the current conflict.”
that Procter & Gamble is a patriotic corporate citizen.”

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) facilitated the donation. Aler Grubbs, USAID/Nigeria Deputy Mission Director, said, “This effort by P&G and UNICEF is a positive proof that corporate collaboration with development partners can promote vibrant and vital models for each side to extend assistance to underprivileged people.”

The P&G donation includes: Always sanitary pads, Pampers baby diapers, Oral B Pro-Health toothpaste, Duracell batteries, and Ariel detergents.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting a set of humanitarian and transitional activities in northeastern Nigeria totaling $78.5 million, in collaboration with the Government of Nigeria at the federal, state, and local levels.

Current and forthcoming activities will provide services for internally displaced persons in northeastern Nigeria, strengthen food security, expand the reach and effectiveness of health and education initiatives, and improve government capacity and performance. USAID efforts in the northeast are focused in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe.

SUMMARY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Disabilities Event Provides Platform for Legislative Advocacy

The U.S. Embassy, in collaboration with the Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni Association of Nigeria and Cedar Seed Foundation, hosted a conference on December 3, 2015 to commemorate the International Day for Persons Living with Disabilities. The event, premised on the theme, “Inclusion Matters: The Urgency of Nigerian Disability Rights Bill,” had in attendance five members of the National Assembly, including Senator David Umaru, Chair of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights, and Legal Matters; and Representative Pwajok Gyang, Chair of the House Committee on Human Rights. Others in attendance included representatives of the National Human Rights Commission and some Nigerian disability rights advocacy organizations. The timing of the event was apt, as the latest bill on disability rights for Nigerians had just been introduced in the Senate and passed its first reading the same week.

Ambassador James Entwistle spoke about the U.S. Mission’s support to the disability community in Nigeria through USAID-funded programs to the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities and the Disability Rights Advocacy Centre. He also mentioned support from President Obama’s Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, which has included persons living with disabilities in its selection of fellows. “We provide this support because we believe that the full integration of persons with disabilities into our societies is not a matter of charity, but a basic issue of civil rights,” he said.

The event also featured the screening of a documentary film on the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was followed by a panel discussion on the Nigerian scenarios.

At the conclusion of the event, Senator Danjuma La’ah, Deputy Chair of the Senate Committee on Poverty Alleviation, pledged his support and that of his Senate colleagues to the quick passage of the Nigerian Disability Rights Bill.
Entrepreneurship, Technology, and Innovation Drive the Economy

Leveraging programming opportunities presented by Global Entrepreneurship Week in November, the U.S. Embassy hosted over 50 entrepreneurs, youth, and innovators for an in-depth discussion with technology executives and government information communication technology (ICT) leaders on business startup strategies and financing options. The Embassy partnered with the Ministry of Communication Technology's National Information Technology Development Agency, the Africa Information and Communication Technologies Alliance, and Mobile Software Solutions to facilitate a lively interaction.

In his remarks, Economic Counselor Alan Tousignant highlighted the critical, economic role of innovation and technology and the importance of eliminating trade and other barriers that limit Nigeria’s access to cutting edge technology.

Tousignant said that technology and innovation are powerful generators of economic growth in his presentation, “Knowing When to Seek Capital and When to Bootstrap.” He told the program participants that they are all part of the future and fortune of Nigeria. “Your innovation, energy, creativity, and acquisition of knowledge, skills, and innovative partnerships will determine Nigeria’s success in years to come,” Tousignant enthused.

Commenting on ICT developments in Nigeria, Tousignant urged Nigeria to continue to work cooperatively with global ICT companies as consultative partners, including in the regulatory process. He said, “When seeking to maximize the benefits of the ICT sector, any measures that would unduly restrict the ways ICT companies can operate would undermine this process.”

As part of the interactive session, the Abuja gathering of young entrepreneurs joined their counterparts around the globe to engage a panel of U.S. experts in discussing ways to secure capital and resources to start a business.

The panel of U.S. experts answered participants’ questions on acquiring resources for startups and how to turn ideas into money-making businesses. The audience inquired about crowdfunding, existing platforms available to connect to international investors, and protecting business and technology ideas from being stolen and used by others. Some also discussed the difficulty in obtaining credibility from international investors for Nigerian startups and the need to develop more technology hubs to assist entrepreneurs and innovators to launch their startups. The participants also discussed patenting ideas and unique products to protect innovations.

Economic Counselor Alan Tousignant (seated, center) joins participants for a group photo.

Habila Kittika (left) receives his certificate of recognition from Tousignant.
Ambassador James F. Entwistle awarded grants totaling $250,000 to 35 Nigerian community-based organizations during a ceremony at the U.S. Embassy.

Through the U.S. Department of State's Special Self-Help Program and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the Ambassador's Small Grants Program provides funding for projects that will benefit and develop neighborhoods, groups, and communities across 20 Nigerian states.

Ambassador Entwistle explained the motivation behind the Small Grants Program. “As a partner, the United States wants Nigeria to thrive. Our direct assistance to improve basic economic and social conditions promotes a conscious responsibility to lift up society. And we are always happy to help people who are trying to help themselves.”

Selected projects include the construction of classrooms, medical clinics, community centers, food processing mills, boreholes, and latrines. The program also provides funding for books, classroom furniture, and several types of equipment to help improve the living and learning conditions of many Nigerians in the homes and villages.

Grants assisting persons and families affected by HIV and AIDS will help spawn innovative projects that provide care and support to orphans, vulnerable children, and their families.

The U.S. Ambassador's Small Grants program provides one-time small grants to community development programs that improve the socio-economic well-being and health of the community. The program is designed to support communities that help themselves. Funding under the program is largely provided by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and by the U.S. Department of State Self-Help Program. Under the small grants program, projects must originate in the community, and the community members need to make significant contributions to the success of the project, such as land, labor, funds, materials, ongoing supervision, and other resources. U.S. contribution to any one project ranges from $3,000 to $10,000. Smaller requests are also welcome. To submit an application, visit: http://nigeria.usembassy.gov/ambshp.html
The U.S. Embassy joined the rest of the world to commemorate International Anti-corruption Day with a roundtable discussion on December 8. The discussion brought together various stakeholders to share ideas on the fight against corruption in Nigeria. They included heads of anti-corruption agencies, legislators, civil society, and international organizations such as the United Nations.

Ambassador James Entwistle said that the day marks the 2003 adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), noting that almost every country in Africa has ratified the convention. “This means that these nations have pledged to adopt measures that prevent and penalize corruption,” he stated.

Ambassador Entwistle spoke of the U.S. commitment to stem graft through its work with Nigeria’s anti-corruption institutions. He disclosed that the U.S. government offers technical assistance, training, and cooperates with Nigerian officials to find evidence and stolen assets held abroad.

The Ambassador concluded that on the 12th anniversary of the UNCAC, “We reflect on how international standards on addressing corruption have been accepted and shared. We are ready to move to the next stage of applying best practices and partnering together to combat a problem found in all societies.”

In his remarks, Attorney General and Minister of Justice Abubakar Malami stated that the Nigerian government had the political will to take necessary steps to tackle the problem of corruption and that the country will also play its role in the international community in addressing the problem.

Deputy Chief of Mission Maria Brewer represented the U.S. Embassy at an event on December 9 organized by the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime commemorating International Anti-corruption Day.
At the request of President Buhari, the United States assisted the Nigerian government in enhancing its press operations through a series of training workshops for government spokespersons, jointly launched in Abuja, on November 9 by U.S. Ambassador James F. Entwistle and the Permanent Secretary of Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Information, Dr. Folashade Yemi-Esan.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Ambassador Entwistle reminded the participants that open and unfettered access to information is the essential ingredient that promotes democracy and accountability in governance, and an effective government press operation is critical to communicating clear and timely information to the public. “Your ability to deliver President Buhari’s messages about counterterrorism, ending corruption, and furthering economic development are important to the future of Nigeria,” said Ambassador Entwistle.

The workshops emphasized the countering of radical narratives and helped the participants create a strong network of colleagues throughout the government of Nigeria. Dr. Yemi-Esan endorsed this approach and asked journalists to show understanding and be patient in the course of seeking credible information.

Abdulwaheed Odusile, president of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), said that while the media maintains its role as a watchdog, both the government and the media have a common objective of providing effective services and being accountable to the people they serve.

In collaboration with the NUJ, the U.S. Mission to Nigeria trained federal government spokespersons representing the Presidency, Senate, House of Representatives, Defense, and key ministries and agencies in Abuja, and duplicated the endeavor in Kaduna and Lagos with the spokespersons to northern and southern governors.

Eduardo Cue, an American media consultant and a former United Nations spokesperson, facilitated the workshops. In 2014, he trained several Nigerian journalists who covered the 2015 elections.
Top Six Myths About U.S. Visas

- Myth: It’s difficult to schedule a visa interview.
  Fact: It’s actually quite easy to schedule an interview. You can complete the application yourself online by visiting www.ustraveldocs.com/ng. There is no need to pay anyone to help you schedule an appointment.

- Myth: Hiring an agent increases your chances of getting a visa.
  Fact: The U.S. Embassy strongly recommends against using agents, or touts, to help applicants with the visa process. They are interested in making money, not getting you a visa. They typically do people a disservice because they don’t understand the process and give people misinformation. In many cases, the agents are taking advantage of people who want a visa to the United States. We strongly recommend that people apply for the visa and go through the entire process on their own.

- Myth: You should bring as many documents as possible to your visa interview.
  Fact: There are very few documents required as part of a non-immigrant visa application. Students should remember to bring their I-20 form and SEVIS payment confirmation. Passports are always required, and old expired passports can frequently be helpful as well. That said, consular officers are trained to primarily rely on the interview rather than documents in making their decisions. It is likely they will not ask to see any documents as part of the interview process.

- Myth: Just say what the officer wants to hear, even if it’s not true.
  Fact: Applicants should always present themselves honestly during the visa interview. The consular officer will ask questions to evaluate your ties to Nigeria. They may ask you questions about your family, your job, how you’ll pay for your travel, and your previous travel outside of Nigeria. The consular officer must be convinced that you have strong ties to your country and that you plan to return when the stated purpose of travel is complete. Even if you don’t meet the requirements based on your current circumstances, you’ll have a better chance of qualifying for a visa in the future if the officer believes you’ve been honest.

- Myth: You won’t get a U.S. visa if you have a “virgin” passport.
  Fact: Previous travel is one factor that the consular officer may consider during the interview, but it is not required. Applicants should never alter their passports with fake stamps or visas to make it appear that they have traveled. Doing so will hurt the applicant’s credibility and the likelihood of visa issuance.

- Myth: There’s nowhere to go for more information.
  Fact: More information about the U.S. visa process is available at http://nigeria.usembassy.gov/visas.html. Applicants can also email the U.S. Embassy in Abuja at consularabuja@state.gov and the Consulate General in Lagos at lagosniv@state.gov

VOTING: More Than a Right, an Obligation

“A republic, madam, if you can keep it.”
--Benjamin Franklin’s answer to an inquiring spectator as to the type of government the Constitutional Convention produced in 1787.

Franklin’s challenge to the curious onlooker is just as compelling today as it was in 1787. The democracy formed by the Constitutional Convention that summer gave tremendous power to the American people—the power to decide their political fate. It also yoked Americans with an incredible burden—the obligation to participate in the political process. Franklin understood this heavy burden and was under no false impression regarding ease of the task ahead. He knew it must be kept; he knew it must be constantly maintained. This is still true today, and his challenge to Americans is still timely. But how does one “keep” a republic? Easy: by voting. By participating in the democratic
process, you are furthering a political revolution of self-determination that began almost 200 years ago.

The franchise as it exists today is dramatically larger than it was in the 1700s when only a select number of white, property-owning males could vote. This did not come easy. It took over 100 years, multiple amendments to the Constitution, numerous acts of Congress, and a slew of Supreme Court decisions to extend the franchise to where it is today. By voting, we stand on the shoulders of our brave civil rights leaders and women suffragists who fought to be able to determine their own political destination and who also fought to be able to rise to Franklin’s challenge to “keep” the republic.

Today “keeping the republic” is easy:

• Submit a Federal Postcard Application (FPCA) to register to vote or to confirm your eligibility to vote and to request 2016 ballots. Visit www.fvap.gov to submit the required documentation and confirm your active status of voter rolls. In fact, in some cases it is possible for American citizens who have never actually been to the United States to vote. Check www.fvap.gov to see if you qualify.

• It’s free! Return your FPCA or completed ballot to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General for mail delivery to the U.S. free of charge. Postage-paid envelopes are available at www.fvap.gov.

Vote to strengthen our democracy. Vote to make your voice heard. Vote because the issues facing the United States and the world are enormous. Vote because your “opinion” is a meaningless matter unless you vote. Vote to keep the republic!

For more information on registering to vote in the United States, contact the American Citizens Services Unit in Abuja (AbujaACS@state.gov) or Lagos (LagosACS@state.gov)

EducationUSA Holds Flagship College Fair

With over 9,000 Nigerians currently studying in the United States, Nigeria has maintained a decade-long increase in the number of students studying at U.S. institutions. In October, EducationUSA Lagos hosted its 16th annual College and Career Fair for prospective students and their parents. Attendees came from public and private schools including three all-girls’ schools.

In his welcome remarks, Frank Sellin, U.S. Consulate General Deputy Public Affairs Officer, introduced the Mandela Washington Fellowship to the audience urging them to “begin with the end in mind.” During the workshop segment, several Nigerian alumni of U.S. institutions spoke about careers in journalism, public relations, law, and engineering. Adaobi Oniwinde, an alumna of both George Washington and American University, emphasized how volunteerism opened a door for her to intern at the White House for two years. She encouraged students to see education in the United States as a springboard for doing great things and having a fulfilling career. Vice consuls Katrina Drayton and Dimitri Varmazis explained the process of getting a student visa and gave helpful tips for interviewing successfully. These tips include:

A. Be prepared, don’t memorize a set of answers to questions you think you will be asked.
B. Think of your visa interview as having a conversation. So try to relax and engage in a conversation.
C. Know why you chose your course of study.
D. Have good proof on how to pay for your degree.
E. Know your plans for the future.
F. Know how your intended school helps you accomplish your educational and career goals.
G. Remember that the visa interview will be short. You have about one minute to show the consular officer that you are a credible and qualified student.
Twice every year in January and August, close to 100 young people from different parts of the globe make their way to a tiny liberal arts college in Santa Fe, New Mexico. They will spend the next four years reading books by authors as diverse as Plato and W.E.B. DuBois. Upon graduation, they will emerge on the other side with a working knowledge of at least three languages—English, French, and Ancient Greek—and an opinion on almost everything.

Four years of math, two years of Greek and French, a year of music, and three years of laboratory science serve the purpose of creating people who can think critically, listen gracefully, and participate fully in the demands of good citizenship from their various communities. The motto of St. John’s College is simple: to make free men from children by means of books and a balance.

Coming to my college from Nigeria was a decision that intrigued people on both sides of the line. Most Nigerians lean towards traditional educational careers like medicine, law, and engineering. When I told family and friends that I would be studying liberal arts in the United States, a few helpfully added, “That’s drawing, right?” Even as I go on to my third year here, I continue to get questions from tutors and interested friends. “Why here?” My answer is always the same: a love of books and learning.

The playwright Lynn Nottage said, “It is an artist’s responsibility to be engaged with the culture. And when the culture is going through turmoil…an artist can’t ignore that.” The lack of diversity of representation in children’s literature is a problem I am particularly concerned about. I want to write stories in which underrepresented children can see and recognize themselves and their worlds. Studying in the United States has allowed me to combine my academic and career interests by providing me with opportunities to engage my interests inside and outside the classroom. The opportunity I have had to help low-income students at the Turquoise Trail Charter School in New Mexico with my college’s Project Politae has helped me to engage with the young children I tutor and added to my academic experience in preparing me for a career as a children’s book author.

My college experience in the United States has helped me gain a clearer understanding of what I want to do professionally and academically. The breadth of perspective I have gained by studying liberal arts with courses ranging from the “History of Mathematics” to “18th Century Opera” to “Ancient Greek” will serve me well in a career as a writer. I am convinced that the more writing-intensive work I do as a liberal arts major will better refine my writing, reading, and editing skills, and will provide me with a smoother transition into a career as a writer within an African and an international context.

“The dearth of children’s literature in Nigeria is a big concern and problem for me,” writes Nneoma Ike-Njoku, an alumna of EducationUSA Abuja. Author and third-year student majoring in liberal arts at St. John’s College, Nneoma shares her U.S. college experience.
On November 25, the U.S. Embassy commemorated the 2015 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women to raise awareness about the global pandemic of violence against women and girls, and mobilize collective action that will bring about lasting solutions to gender-based violence within communities throughout Nigeria.

This event was organized in collaboration with the Friendraiser Community and involved the screening of New Morning, an advocacy film on gender-based/domestic violence that highlights practical steps victims of gender-based violence can take to seek redress. Following the film screening, Professor Joy Ezeilo, Founder/Chief Executive Officer of Women’s Aid Collective, and Dr. Kole Shettima, Director of the MacArthur Foundation’s Africa office, led a panel discussion on “Breaking the Culture of Silence, Uniting to End Violence Against Women.” The panelists explored the role of men in ending violence against women and the need for a robust campaign that identifies support mechanisms available to victims. During the interactive panel, participants also shared practical experiences of working with victims of gender-based violence.

The key takeaway from the event was the importance of more advocacy and mass awareness, particularly on the warning signs of an abusive relationship. More importantly, the participants pledged to take practical steps towards ending gender-based violence, such as mobilizing “HeForShe” champions within the communities, religious circles, and in the workplace; and breaking the culture of silence by speaking up when they witness abuse and violence. Civil society attendees also pledged to continue to advocate for legislative support for core gender issues that were raised during the discussion.

On December 9, the U.S. Embassy celebrated the 75th anniversary of U.S. government-sponsored international exchange programs with more than 70 Nigerian alumni. Alumni shared their life-changing experiences, lessons learned, and their efforts to give back to Nigerian society. Nine U.S. Fulbright scholars currently conducting research at various Nigerian institutions also joined the celebration. Since 1940, the U.S. Department of State has promoted mutual understanding through these people-to-people exchanges.

In her remarks, the U.S. Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission, Maria E. Brewer, described U.S. exchanges as mechanisms to fill in the gaps of what American culture and society are missing. “We are not only a reflection of our skyscrapers, our monuments, or Hollywood movies,” Mrs. Brewer said. “We are also a diverse country grappling with serious issues over the dinner table and in the public square,” she added.

More than 385 current and former heads of states, 63 Noble laureates, and thousands of leaders worldwide in both private and non-profit organizations are alumni of the U.S. government-sponsored international exchange programs. To read more, visit: http://1.usa.gov/1vrU5He
As part of continuing support from the United States to the government and the people of Nigeria to defeat Boko Haram, the U.S. government donated 24 Mine-Resistant Armor-Protected (MRAP) vehicles, valued at $11 million, to Nigeria’s military on January 7.

“These vehicles provide increased protection from improvised explosive devices, roadside bombs, and small arms fire, while offering more maneuverability and better fuel economy than other types of armored personnel carriers,” the U.S. Defense Attaché, Colonel Patrick Doyle, said.

The U.S. government donated the armored vehicles through the Excess Defense Articles Program. The Nigerian military arranged for transportation from the port to Lagos. Nigeria is in the process of receiving an additional eight MRAPs through this program, valued at approximately $7.4 million.

The Excess Defense Articles Program is designed to transfer excess military equipment from the United States to foreign governments or international organizations to help with modernization of partner nation military capabilities.

Through a similar program, the U.S. government donated to the Nigerian Navy the NNS Okpabana in 2014 and NNS Thunder in 2012. The two ships have bolstered maritime security in Nigeria.

The equipment donation represents part of the continuing U.S. commitment to Nigeria and its neighbors to counter Boko Haram’s senseless acts of terror and promote regional security. ❖
President Obama has answered Martin Luther King’s call to service. Will you?

Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to building a more just and equitable society. But the respected civil rights leader challenged us all to build a better world. “Life’s most persistent and urgent question,” he declared, is “What are you doing for others?”

Every year, Americans answer that question by coming together on King’s birthday, celebrated on the third Monday in January, to serve their neighbors and communities. Citizens across the country—including the first family—deliver meals, refurbish schools, and collect food and clothing for the needy.

The resources highlighted below are available at the Information Resource Centers in Abuja and Lagos. To register as a member, please visit: http://tinyurl.com/ircregistration and for all enquiries, please write to: ircabuja@state.gov (North) and wyllagos@state.gov (South).

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Do You Want to Study in the United States?

The EducationUSA Advising Centers in Abuja and Lagos provide quality, timely, accurate, and unbiased information about all accredited U.S. higher education institutions for persons wishing to study in the United States. For more information about EducationUSA and study opportunities in the United States, please visit: http://www.educationusa.state.gov.

EducationUSA Advising Center Locations:

Abuja:
Embassy of the United States of America
Plot 1075 Diplomatic Drive, Central District Area
Abuja. Telephone: 234-09-4614251/4241/4257
Fax: 234-09-4614334/4010; E-mail: eacabuja@state.gov
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/educationusa.abuja

Lagos:
U.S. Consulate General, Public Affairs Section
2 Walter Carrington Crescent; Victoria Island, Lagos
Telephone: 01-460-3801/3802
Email: lagoseducationusa@state.gov
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/EducationUSALagos/

At EducationUSA, counselors assist clients to:
- select and apply to appropriate U.S. institutions
- provide information on standardized tests required for admission such as TOEFL, SAT, GRE, and GMAT
- help students understand what life will be like in a new environment and culture. Visit any of our centers in Abuja and Lagos today.

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day honors the life and legacy of one of the visionary leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and recipient of the 1964 Nobel Prize for Peace. At a young age, Martin Luther King, Jr. showed strong promise, skipping the 9th and 12th grades and entering Morehouse College at the age of 15. His beliefs in equality and brotherly love developed early as he listened to the sermons of his father and grandfather, both ministers. Download a 6-page document here: http://goo.gl/WF2PEy

Rosa Parks Center
Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy
Plot 1075 Diplomatic Drive Central District Area
Abuja, Nigeria
Telephone: 09-461-4000 Fax: 0-9-461-4011
E-Mail: ircabuja@state.gov
Visit us at: http://nigeria.usembassy.gov
Open
9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday
To get on the mailing list, send an e-mail to ircabuja@state.gov; wyllagos@state.gov or eacabuja@state.gov

Whitney M. Young Information Resource Center
Public Affairs Section, U.S. Consulate General
2 Walter Carrington Crescent, Victoria Island, Lagos Nigeria
Telephone: 01-460-5400
Fax: 01-1-261-2218
E-mail: wyllagos@state.gov
Open
9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday
9:00 a.m.-12 noon Friday
To get on the mailing list, send an e-mail to ircabuja@state.gov; wyllagos@state.gov or eacabuja@state.gov

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Whitney M. Young Information Resource Center
Public Affairs Section, U.S. Consulate General
2 Walter Carrington Crescent, Victoria Island, Lagos Nigeria
Telephone: 01-460-5400
Fax: 01-1-261-2218
E-mail: wyllagos@state.gov
Open
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