HOW GODWIN OBASEKI'S ADMINISTRATION IS CREATING PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY FOR EDOS AND NIGERIANS
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Editor's Note

Edo State Job Creation Report November 2019

How Godwin Obaseki’s Administration Is Creating Pathways To Prosperity For Edos And Nigerians

The Nigerian economy slowed to a 1.94 percent real GDP growth rate at the end of the second quarter of 2019. In Q1 2019, the real GDP growth rate was 2.10 percent. Generally, growth slowdown has implications both for existing businesses and new investments: it implies a shortfall in output, which leads to a decline in the demand for labour; hence, unemployment. As economic growth falters, unemployment rises which eventually leads to decline in aggregate demand and consequently, recession. This should be of serious concern to well-meaning Nigerians because as economic activity slows; it is an indication that the overall economy is need of an impetus, as some sectors are already swimming in trouble waters. Consequently, as aggregate demand slows, impacting on the means of livelihood of households and businesses. The implication of a slowdown in aggregate demand and household incomes is that companies and government establishments will be constrained to meet their obligations such as paying creditors, wages and salaries as well as taxes to government at as when due. Unimpressive economic growth manifests in many forms. At present, over 20 million able-bodied Nigerians are unemployed and the number of jobless Nigerians keeps increasing due to high population growth and labour availability at a rate that surpasses the economy capacity to create jobs.

Against this backdrop, the Edo State Government, under the leadership of His Excellency, Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki, the Executive Governor of the state, right from assumption of office, made job creation the fulcrum of his administration.

Through the job creation portal, edojobs.edostate.gov.ng, the state government adopted a multipronged approach which seeks to connect job seekers with employers of labour, equipping job seekers with skills required to thrive in the dynamics of the modern labour market.

From agriculture, transportation, accountancy, healthcare, administration, craftsmanship, media and internet, education, HR as well as engineering and services, an average Nigerian living in Edo State will have one economic activity to engage in and that is perfectly in line with the state government’s policy of raising the standard of living of the people through economic empowerment.

It is now three and half years down the line since the administration was inaugurated. In this regard, BusinessDay Research and Intelligence Unit (BRIU), having been contracted by the Edo State Government, provided an insight into the growth and success stories the state has recorded thus far, not excluding the challenges over the last 3 years as well as the optimism for the future.
Background

Godwin Obaseki’s Job Creation Drive

State governments’ policies and programs in recent times have focused on addressing the deteriorating unemployment situation in the country.

With a national unemployment rate at over 20 percent, it is expected that the youths, most of whom constitute the unemployed group, could be tempted to use their exuberance to wreak havoc in the country.

It is particularly interesting for Edo State which before the coming on board of the from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that 29 percent of narcotic drugs seized in Nigeria were from Edo State, leading to the arrests of 1,284 indigenes of the state. The state was also notorious for human trafficking. According to the International Organisation for Migration, the trafficked ladies, upon arrival in Italy, were found with bruises and other signs of violence.

With the above scenario, no reasonable government would fold its arms, and that explained why Governor Obaseki from the outset, made job creation the fulcrum of his administration.

Evaluation scorecard of the promise made by the current administration in the state government vis a vis the projects it has implemented on job creation in the state.

Methodology adopted

This report uses both primary and secondary data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>No. of Beneficiaries</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>JOB TRACKING</td>
<td>46,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>JOB MATCHING AND PLACEMENT</td>
<td>3,434</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT &amp; ENTREPRENEURSHIP</td>
<td>22,872</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>EDO INNOVATES</td>
<td>27,732</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>EDO FOOD AND AGRIC CLUSTER</td>
<td>1,376</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EDO PRODUCTION CENTRE</td>
<td>161</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MIN. OF WEALTH CREATION</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSIP</td>
<td>12,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>INDIRECT JOBS</td>
<td>32,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>156,994</td>
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</table>

Governor Obaseki from the outset made job creation the fulcrum of his administration. He promised to create 200,000 jobs directly and indirectly during his first term in office.
terviews, phone interviews, focus group discussions, among others. The primary data was gathered by BusinessDay Research team while the secondary data, especially on jobs created and their distribution across sectors came from Edo Jobs. Field works lasted for a week. BusinessDay Research team, having received brief from officials of Edo Jobs, also deemed it fit to corroborate information from all the parties mentioned through unscheduled visits, in most cases. This allowed us to appraise the projects of the government without allowing the beneficiaries to tamper with the true state of affairs.

Places visited included rice farms in Warriake and Agebode; Edo Innovation Hub; Edo Production Centres and some stand-alone SMEs. We interviewed a number of the beneficiaries of these projects to hear from the horses’ mouths so that the state government could know areas where improvements are still needed.

Questions asked included information dissemination mechanism, that is, how did they get to know about the empowerment programs? We found out their academic status, employment status whether they were unemployed and under employed as at the time of registering for the scheme; how much they paid for the training programs for the students; how much start-ups, farmers, and other SMEs paid to be allocated spaces at the incubation centre, production centre and to participate in the farming activities.

**How did they get to know about the empowerment programs?**

Majority of the beneficiaries hinted that they got the information from friends, family and church members, radio announcements and SMS. Initially, the news was received with a pinch of salt. The successful beneficiaries only wanted to give it a try. They are now the ones advising their colleagues to come for the subsequent training programs.

**Establishment of Edo State Skills Development Agency or Edo Jobs**

Governor Obaseki’s magic wand was the establishment of Edo Jobs under the leadership of Ukinebo Dare.

“It all started with the governor, with his vision to make Edo State the centre of industrialisation. The strategic positioning of the state makes it a natural hub. In driving this vision, the governor set up a skill development agency to attract the demand of highly skilled talent in Edo State. So we want a situation where people could engage in entertainment, manufacturing, construction, ICT and agriculture”, Ukinebo Dare, head, Edo Jobs, said.

“We started with job matching – this is a situation where we provide talents to employers based on the need of the employers. Even if you cannot find someone in the kind of level you are looking out for, we will train them to that level”, Dare added.

**Employment status**

Over a million indigenes of Edo State were unemployed as at the time of registration for the programme. Others were engaged in home tuition or attached to different tutorial centres just to earn livelihood.

“I was into teaching before. I knew it wasn’t what I wanted to do. I have flair for information technology. Luckily, when I got to know about the incubation centre; I came, saw things for myself. Immediately, I said this is where I belong”, one of the start-ups at the Edo Innovation Hub said.

**How much did beneficiaries pay?**

The training programs came at no cost to the beneficiaries. For instance, Curators University offers its data analytics programs in Lagos at about N170,000; and N50,000 in Akure, the Ondo State capital. But in Edo State, it is free to beneficiaries, courtesy of the state government sponsorship through Edo Jobs. Occupants at Edo Innovates and Edo Production Centre paid a token as subscription fee. This gives them access to work spaces, internet and constant power supply as well as other facilities. with the rest taken care of by the state government, in order to ensure continuous availability of power supply and other facilities at the centre.

**Jobs creation: How far has the state government gone?**

In two and half years, that is, from 2017 to September 2019, the state government, directly and indirectly, has created 119,074 jobs, representing 60 percent of the promise made by Governor Obaseki. On an annual basis, 19 percent or 22,828 jobs were created in 2017. The job creation drive produced better result in 2018 as 42 percent or 49, 670 jobs were created in that year. By September 2019, the state government, through Edo Jobs, succeeded in creating 46,576 jobs representing 39 percent of the jobs created so far.

The governor had a big vision which has continued to metamorphose and grow to what no one imagined at the beginning. We wanted to show people, unlike the usual political process of campaigning without clear plans to implement campaign promises, we set out to create database that can accommodate up to 200,000 or more people that are unemployed, so as to keep our campaign promises. Where the process has gone now, is an eclipse of where it was before”, Lambert Ugorji, MD, Edo State ICT Academy, said.
**Sectoral distribution of jobs**

If 119,074 jobs were created by Edo Jobs, the logical question that follows is where were those jobs created? This section provides insights into that. The areas or sections where jobs were created include job tracking; job matching and placement; skills development and entrepreneurship; Edo Innovates and Edo Food and Agric Cluster. Others are Edo Production Centre, Ministry of Wealth Creation and NSIP.

By distribution, Job Tracking accounted for 35 percent or 41,156 jobs were created through this service. Edo Innovates created 23 percent of the jobs; the Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Centre created 19 percent of the jobs and NSIP created 10 percent of the jobs. The weights of others are less than two digits.

The Ministry of Wealth Creation was responsible for 8 percent of the jobs created thus far in Edo State. Job matching and placement accounted for 3 percent while the agric clusters accounted for 1 percent of the jobs created so far in the state.

Edo Production Centre has created 91 jobs and this may not be unconnected with the period the centre opened for business activities. It was in June 2019 that the first set of SMEs were admitted into the centre, which houses fabrication, furniture making, shoe making, Bini bronze casting, fashion designing workshop, among others.

**Other findings from the field**

The trips made to strategic locations in Edo State revealed a number of opportunities that the government intervention has created which are yet to be captured. BusinessDay Research presents some of these findings below:

**Success rate is 100%**

Governments at the federal and state levels in Nigeria have adopted a number of interventions in order to improve the productive capacity of SMEs. A good example is Tradermoni which is meant to provide finance to petty traders.

In Edo State, the state government adopted an improved version of Tradermoni. This is because rather than give the money to individual SMEs, the state government, instead, committed such funds to addressing the challenges of SMEs in the state through the provision of conducive venues with adequate facilities. A case in point is the Edo Production Centre where SMEs that are into manufacturing have access to electricity supply for 24 hours in a day. SME owners have modern offices and other facilities such as toilets and bathrooms.

“it shows the level of seriousness of the state government. If they had given the money to us, some individuals might not have used the money for what it was meant for”, an SME owner said during our interactions with them. In other words, the success rate in the utilisation of funds for supporting SMEs is 100 percent because the facilities are there for SME owners to enjoy.

Other places where this model was applied include Warrake Town, Agenebode, and other farm clusters where the state government deployed tractors to clear hundreds of hectares of land for planting of rice, maize and oil palm plantation. An average farmer was given five hectares of land.

**Government positioning Edo residents for the challenges of the future**

According to the leading consulting firms globally, many of the future jobs are not yet created, and that future workers must be ready to learn and unlearn. Addressing his people in October this year, Governor Brad Little of the State of Idaho, United States of America (USA) emphasised the need for collaboration among all the stakeholders in order to position Americans for the jobs of the future.

“There is a greater focus on STEM skills now than any other time in Idaho's history. Technological advances and the anticipated automation of more jobs down the road mean families, schools and colleges must push students toward a lifetime of embracing technological changes, problem solving and continual training. State programs are bridging the gap between business and student by facilitating internships and apprenticeships because, after all, the best way to learn a job is by doing it”, Little said.

While the State of Idaho just came up with that idea that now, Governor Obaseki established that concept in 2017. A good example is the Edo Innovates, the state innovation hub that houses a lot of start-ups such as Edo Bits, Curators University that provides data analytics such as Python, R as well as Xigma and New Digit.
instance, training program in data analytics such as pythons and R could cost about N150,000 to N170,000; beneficiaries only receive the training programs at no cost to them.

A unique feature of the Incubation Centre is its accommodative capacity to train anyone in the field of ICT within a short period of time, regardless of your background. This has allowed Edo residents who were unemployed due to their courses of study to move to other professions within the shortest possible time. Products of some of these start-ups now work online for reputable companies across the globe and thus making their livelihood from the comfort of their homes. This simply shows that the discipline that you studied at school should not be a barrier to one succeeding in life. That foundation has been laid in Edo State.

**SME clusters expand market opportunities**

When SMEs operate in clusters, market opportunities expand. This is one of our findings at the production centre where the output (fabricated machines) of an SME outfit is the input of another nearby (Polythene bags maker). This means the players in this sector could predict their monthly sales, and adequately trace fluctuations in sales.

**Enhancement of knowledge transfer**

The different centres created by the state government have started to aid the transfer of knowledge between those in the academia and SMEs. For instance, at the Edo Production Centre, BusinessDay Research team ran into an undergraduate, a 400-level production engineering student of the University of Benin who chose to learn the practical aspects of her discipline at the machine fabrication centre.

“When I came here, I was impressed by what I saw. It was purely practical and that is what I need now. We have been doing theory for 3 and half years in school. One of the major things I have learnt here is fabrication and how to make a machine out of scraps”, the undergraduate said.

**Edo Jobs shows empowerment is no rocket science**

When implemented, the new minimum wage in Nigeria will be N30,000, which translates to N1000 per day. Meanwhile, some of the beneficiaries have started to make money even when they are yet to complete their programs. Based on our findings, the average monthly income of some of the beneficiaries who are into part time jobs ranges from N50,000 to N350,000. This shows that with state intervention as demonstrated by the Edo State Government, Nigerians could be empowered to earn more than the minimum wage at anytime.

Further, some beneficiaries have pooled resources together to set up their own business such as Green Fusion Energy which provides solar energy services to households. Although, this firm less than two years, monthly sales run into thousands of naira, if not millions, and has started getting orders from Delta and Lagos states.

Another one is Xigma and New Digit, of which the latter is the commercial wing of the former. According to the owners, New Digit, which was established in 2018, was valued at $1 million (N360m) as at the last valuation exercise.

**When I came here, I was impressed by what I saw. It was purely practical and that is what I need now. We have been doing theory for 3 and half years in school. One of the major things I have learnt here is fabrication and how to make a machine out of scraps**
In Edo State, we make it happen-
Governor Obaseki

Your Excellency, you promised to create 200,000 jobs during your first term in office. What informed this decision of yours and how far has the program gone after three years in office?

There is a documented description by a Portuguese Captain that visited Edo in 1691, he said “...The city is wealthy and industrious. It is so well governed that theft is unknown and the people live in such security that they have no doors to their houses.”

There is a saying that if you do not know where you are coming from you will not know where you are going to. So, the promise to create 200,000 jobs in 4 years was born out of an understanding of the industrious nature of Edo people as well as the knowledge of the unique potential of the state to attract investments and create jobs. My team and I were fully convinced that the transformation agenda we had already set in motion would re-ignite our people and the state’s economy and create jobs as a result. For example, our location makes us a natural transport and infrastructure hub in Nigeria and we are leveraging on that to become a production hub.

With a keen eye, we saw into the future which has become our reality today.

The Edo State Skills Development Agency was signed into law and along with all ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in this government; we are driving one agenda and vision- to deliver a prosperous Edo to our people. Over 150,000 people in Edo State have so far benefitted directly and indirectly from our interventions in the area of skills development and job creation and we are gearing up to reach even more people.

Some sectors are critical to this project. What makes those sectors unique?

The first thing our administration did with regards to skills development and job creation was to identify the size of the problem and identify the sectors with the greatest potential to solve them. We carried out a state-wide registration of job seekers and it was a painstaking effort as we decided to leave no stone unturned. Approximately, 200,000 people turned up to be registered, and while that was going on, we were mapping each town and local government area to identify sectors with the highest potential to create jobs. All of these yielded invaluable information on the areas of strengths and gaps in our labour force. Edo Jobs was then setup to implement strategies to create the demand for highly skilled talent in Edo State and provide the supply of that talent with a focus on agriculture, information technology, the creative industry, construction and manufacturing.

How did you convince the people to believe in the job creation processes?

As with many other things in life, ‘seeing is believing’. The number of people that showed up for the Edo Jobs registration was a proof that our people believed in us, and we were not going to let them down. We proceeded to the implementation stage very quickly by engaging a professional who had been doing very well in the area of job creation and who is coincidentally from Edo State. From the time of the first Job Summit and Job Fair in 2017 till date, people in every local government area of Edo State have felt the tangible impact of the state
government’s job creation drive through our innovation hub, skill acquisition, job matching and apprentice programs and so on. We call ourselves a “Make It Happen” government because people can argue with theories and plans, but no one can argue with results.

To what extent is the private sector involved in the job creation project in Edo State?
The private sector is a major stakeholder. First of all, they are the employers. With our drive for investment promotion yielding a lot of results, there is a demand for highly skilled talent and our up skills programs are demand-driven by requests from the private sector. Secondly, our home grown MSMEs and SMEs are a large creators of jobs so we are continually implementing projects to provide them with facilities, infrastructure, training, access to markets and improved access to funding.

This drive has resulted in projects implemented by Edo Jobs like Edo Production Centre, the Edo Innovation Hub, the Agric-Cluster and so on. We are also collaborating with various private sector partners who are responding to the new vibrant business environment and are setting up large operations in Edo State for example; Nosak Group and MainOne. These activities are carried out by the Edo State Investment Promotion office and the Public Private Partnership office as well.

What is your future plan for this project?
Our future plans are focused on scaling up and sustainability. Edo Jobs and its initiatives are now housed within the Edo State Skills Development Agency and we are actively engaging with the private sector to secure partnerships that will ensure sustainability. Also, we invite national and international partners and investors to key into the drive for job creation and the development of human capacity for overall growth of our great state and Nigeria at large.
EDO STATE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

TOP PRIORITY AREAS

- Job Matching, Skills Acquisition And Entrepreneurship
- Technology & Innovation
- Creative Industry
- Manufacturing & Construction
- Agriculture
If there anything that the current administration in Edo State has got right, it is by making UKINEBO DARE the head of Edo State Skills Development Agency, popularly known as Edo Jobs. She has knacks for training unemployed youths and connecting them to opportunities. Edo Jobs started with the mandate to create 200,000 jobs. Three and half years down the line, the Agency now has so many success stories, testimonials to its credit. How did Edo Jobs achieve all these laudable feats? BusinessDay Research and Intelligence Unit (BRIU) engaged her in a chat. Excerpts:

What actually informed your decision to make job creation a fulcrum of your programme?

It all started with the governor, with his vision to make Edo State a centre on industrialisation. When he was campaigning, he promised to create 200,000 jobs in four years. Knowing the job crisis in Nigeria, many people didn’t believe him. But the strategic positioning of the state makes it a natural hub. You cannot go to the south or north without passing through Edo.

Secondly, job creation has always been my passion; I have been doing this for several years. It was very interesting seeing that my state government has that passion and drives to create jobs. For me, I will say it is just a divine coincidence, because I don’t know the governor from anywhere. In 2017, I was a Mandela Washington fellow, so the state needed somebody to drive the vision since it aligned with what I am doing, it was not so easy for me to be spotted out because the governor wanted work with the best.

Also, things are done scientifically here. We don’t just do things for the sake of doing it. That is, take pictures and nothing is really going on. When we came on board, we partnered UKAid and DFID to check the statistics of all the locals and also do a research to answer the following:

What are the opportunities there in Edo State? What are the things in high demand? What can they export, among others?

These serve as a guide. So, when we are training; it is targeted to a specific area. In driving this vision, the governor set up a skill development agency to attract the demand of highly skilled talent in Edo state. So we want a situation where people could engage in entertainment, manufacturing, construction, ICT and Agriculture. Making this listed sector has Edo state stronghold. People feel Lagos has already taken over ICT, we are giving Lagos a run for their money right now because Facebook has opened a developer circle here, also Uber and Google. In fact, we are partnering all the big names. They are surprised at how much talent we have been able to bring together within a short period of time.

You said you carried out some research before you embarked on the job creation project. So, what did you find out?

Based on the findings in that report and our vision, we decided to implement the project on the 5 key aforementioned sectors. For example, look at this board, the tags are the programs we do in each of the local governments in Edo State. It gives us direction on where we are.

These are areas of special importance to this project such as job matching, skill development, agro processor and production centres.

So, what unique thing will you say about each of these identified areas?

Our projects fit into the aforementioned sectors. We started with job matching – this is a situation where we provide talents to employers based on the need of the employer. The governor is doing a lot of developmental programs and investors are coming to set up companies in the state. However, we did not want them to come with the impression of not getting the best hands to employ here in Edo State. For instance, we have a company that said they would bring 100 employees. But by the time we discussed with them and showed them evidence of programmes we have conducted so far for our youth, they end up coming in with 18 members of staff, and the rest were employed from Edo State. That is what we do with job matching. Even if you cannot find someone in the kind of level you are looking out for, we will train them to that level.

For example, we have hundreds of youths globally certified in computer-aided digital design, a highly sort after skill. Often, when we see the demand, immediately we train people to meet up with that demand. The job matching team does that. When they get the vacancy, they post it on the portal online. But, if it is a vacancy for the rural communities, we do a bulk SMS. When Edo Jobs started, the first thing we did was to register people across the state. Presently, we have over 200,000 people registered on the portal. We reach out to them to let them know the opportunities. But at first, the people did not believe. However, when they started seeing people benefiting their perception changed.

After the job matching we have the innovation hubs which are just like creating an ecosystem. In the innovation hubs, we are
teaching them all skills in IT – how to make business more effective through IT, digital marketing and how to make money online.

What is unique about the innovation hubs is the ecosystem – we have start-ups, ICT and work place. Also, we have agric clusters in a rural community. So we are working to improve the income of farmers, yield and teach them more profitable crops they can farm.

For example, we have a vegetable farming program going on and they are farming with an imported seedling. At the moment, they are learning how to plant tomatoes differently from what they are used to. And then, will bring people to come and buy from them directly. We have done things in poultry, ruminant farming, and we are about to start feed processing. We want to exploit all the opportunities within the agriculture value chain. It has changed drastically, from 2016 to now. At the beginning there was a lot of resistance from the public and even the private sector. The good thing was that we were able to work the talk.

If you compare your target with actual, how much of the 200,000 jobs have you created?

By the end of 2017, we had already hit over 30,000 jobs that include a little more from 2016. The majority of the numbers came in 2018, because that was when we set up the innovation hubs, the skill acquisition centres, so we create job through skill acquisitions and support of SMEs in addition to the job matching.

If you have 1,000 people that have small businesses when you structure them and they grow and have more clients, if each of them employs 1 person each; that means having 1,000 new jobs.

Thanks to our skill acquisition and entrepreneurship programmes, the job matching and the new companies that came into the state. Nosak Group is coming in to set up 100,000 hectares of farm land. With all these, we have already crossed 110,000 beneficiaries of Edo Jobs, even for us is unbelievable, but you see, the reason it works is that we don’t compete with the private sector rather we enable the private sector. If you want to do job creation properly, you have to be selfless.

One major thing we do is to expose people to existing opportunities; we have done all these future of work seminars, we introduce them to sectors that are booming, so that, they are not restricted to their courses of study. The official name of the agency is Edo State Skills Development Agency. So we are really training them and satisfying them in skills that are on-demand.

We do a lot of sensitization through radio, TVs and local newspapers so that people can see.

Though, we are focused on Edo State residents (even if they are not from here but they live here), most of our outreach are done here locally but we want people out there to know, we need all the support we can get. To be able to do all these is short time is a quick win.

If you have 1,000 people that have small businesses when you structure them and they grow and have more clients if each of them employs 1 person each; that means having 1,000 new jobs – we classify this under indirect jobs.

In terms of job distribution, women are always at disadvantage. Do you have special focus on women?

Yes, we introduced some initiatives to accommodate women. The Office of the first lady Betsy Obaseki has so many initiatives driving this. At the Innovation hub, she setup The Centre for Women Development with HP Life. There are other programs like Girls can code, Women Tech Style, Women in Business, etc. We do specific programs for the women so that they are not competing with the men for opportunities. In agriculture as well (EDO FAC), we did a program on poultry, bird rearing, and over 70 per cent of the participants were women. Some of our projects are naturally women inclined, like the fish processing that I mentioned earlier.

All the participants were women. We are trying to promote locally sourced ingredients to boost local production. Also, we are doing something around cosmetics and skin care, women dominate that too.

So far, what are your challenges, and in which areas do you still need additional support from the private sectors?

Sincerely, we need all the support we can get, because the demands for these things are getting high. For the agric clusters, we are looking at agric processing as we want the private sector that are into processing to come and set up their plants here in Edo State. For the innovation hubs, we need partners that will fund tech trainings that can connect people to get jobs and start up their own businesses. For the skill acquisition programmes in the rural communities, we need people who are into logistics that will facilitate the movement of farm produce. We want sponsorship for training programs, funding for people with unique business ideas, among others.
**Examples of Jobs created and partner organisations**

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<tr>
<th>JOB TRACKING</th>
<th>JOB MATCHING AND PLACEMENT</th>
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<td>Alliance Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction &amp; Electricity Distribution</td>
<td>Bridge Academies International</td>
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<td>Edo State Ministry Of Wealth Creation</td>
<td>Edo State Traffic Management Agency</td>
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<td>Edo State Ministry Of Infrastructure</td>
<td>Edo Property Development Agency</td>
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<td>Edo City Transport Service</td>
<td>Edo Procurement Agency</td>
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*Job Tracking: The Skills Development Agency tracks and records jobs that are created directly by Ministries Departments, MDAs and Government partnerships with the private sector. Details for these jobs are received by the Edo State Skills Development Agency and collated on behalf of the government. The Agency also tracks jobs created in private sector organisations as a result of them taking advantages of initiatives to create an enabling environment for business within Edo state*

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*Skills Development And Entrepreneurship refers to vocational skills programs targeted and enabling people to get skills and start a business as well as programs designed to support individuals to start businesses*

**Job Matching** tracks the number of individuals directly placed in jobs through the Edo Jobs portal. The process involves sourcing for vacancies from businesses within Edo state and new entrants into the state. The Skills Development Agency trains individuals to meet employer demands and also recruits from the registered members on the portal to fill these vacancies. The Agency also sources for internship and apprenticeship opportunities for Edojobbers and places them.

**Program**

1. ICT labs and training on IT and connections to jobs in the tech sector and supports businesses to grow.
2. Edo Innovates also provides training and delivers solutions to students and young people in secondary school.
3. Incubation and Entrepreneurship training programs
Could you please tell us what your responsibility at Edo Jobs is all about?
The Placement Unit basically focuses on grooming the people to take up opportunities that the improving business environment creates in the state. We partner the private and public organisations to achieve this. We recruit personnel for Edo State.

How could an investor know some of the applicants since some are not based in this state?
Our responsibilities are in two parts. We organise training programs to upscale our people to meet the skill level the employer demands. As a private business, you would only want to employ people who have the needed skills set and competency for your business to thrive. We are reaching out to partners of these kinds to say that present in Edo State, we have a database of over three hundred thousand people—qualified residents of Edo State for different job opportunities. We are reaching out to these organisations to say that we have the people in our database to fill up those roles. Irrespective of what roles you think you need to fill up, we have the right set of people. Even if they don't meet up to your capacity, we will groom and train them for you.

We rolled out standards in relation to recruitment where we identify the organisations that are looking to engage people. We understand the kinds of responsibilities and job descriptions they want. We reach out to our people within the database; we identify the people with the right set of skills to match up those jobs. If we do not find, we train them until they match up to that skill. Then we set the meeting for them to interact and we take the conversation forward.

We have been able to get companies and top organisations to recruit through this process. People that initially did not believed in the process are starting to believe in it right now. We have got a couple of international and local organisations to use our platform. And trust me; we have got a lot of positive feedbacks from these organisations.

What are the challenges that you are facing now and what are you doing to overcome those challenges?
One of the major challenges that we faced at the early phase was that of push backs, bordering on element of trust between government and private institutions. It was across board, but we knew that persistence and consistence would change everything. That is why we must be thorough. With consistency and the amount of work we put in when we interview these candidates before we send them, that has given us a good landing for referrals. People usually believe that it is better to work in a government parastatal than to work for private organisations. With the influx of private organisations demanding our services, people feel reluctant and sometimes decline if it is a private organisation unlike MDAs. This we have been tackling and to a large extent it is changing because we now conduct some sensitisation program. For example, we do marketing training for them. They wouldn't feel that marketing is a slave trade. We teach them all the matrix of marketing.

Lastly, we have not actually embraced ICT here as much as we would have loved to but that is what gave rise to the hub, so, people could develop their ICT skills. To address this is why MainOne is laying fibre optics across Edo State. This will enable people to know how to use social media platforms and leverage on opportunities using their phones. We have transited from the era when people have to go to the cyber café to get information; now they can do all of that on their mobile phones.

What are the gains so far that you can point to? How do you think the government and the people of the state will benefit from these investments?
State wise, what the government set to achieve is to make Edo State an economic hub just like Lagos. Nothing stops us from being second or third. If you follow through with recent news, you will see that by statistics Edo State was ranked the highest in terms of capital development projects, even above Lagos. Now, what the governor wants to achieve is to change the narrative that people cannot make it here unless they seek opportunities outside the state. The opportunities are everywhere: it is just for us to expose ourselves to those opportunities.

The governor is building an industrial park; he is working on a seaport. Consequently, organisations are already anticipating; they are coming in. While these opportunities are coming up, the state must not lack the human capacity when these organisations are fully here. This is why we are investing heavily in human capital, train them for the opportunities so that we can connect these organisations with our people.

The ultimate goal is to stop illegal migration from Edo State. It is something that we are not ashamed to say. Interestingly, the trend has greatly reduced over the years. It is difficult to convince somebody to follow you to Libya on foot because the sensitisation is there.
People are now aware and they are seeing opportunities and a lot have been trained by our platform. You cannot employ those people right now because they are not ready to be on a full-time program for anybody. They prefer to do freelance jobs or consult for different partners and then just make their money. So you see the level of exposure we are building.

**Interview with Jiro Ejogbe**

*MD, Viisaus Technology Limited*

**What was the role of Viisaus Consulting Limited in the setup of Edo Jobs?**

Our role in the setup of Edo Jobs was to register and manage a database of two-hundred thousand unemployed and under-employed residents of Edo State. The process of registering unemployed residents in the state comprised of project management, logistics, and technology.

**Project Management**

We designed the project plan and scope of work including schedule, budget, and resources needed for state-wide registration exercise; we designed and implemented the registration and crowd control process for state-wide registration exercise, as we as designed and implemented the media strategy for the state-wide registration exercise.

**Logistics**

We trained the team that was deployed to the 18 local government area in the state to register unemployed residents; organized the movement and accommodation of the registration teams across the 18 local government areas.

**Technology**

My unit documented the functional and technical requirements for the software application to capture, manage and analyze the information about the unemployed in Edo State; designed and developed the online registration software application; provided technical support and management of an online registration portal; supported data fetching for job matching and training opportunities from the database while we also upgraded the online software application to allow registration of employers and start-ups.

**How were you able to reach out to people in remote communities?**

We were able to reach out to the people in remote communities through:
- Sensitization meetings with community heads
- Use of town criers to disseminate information to villagers
- Set up of pop up centres in churches, mosques, and markets
- Radio and TV adverts

**What is your advice for Governments trying to setup similar initiatives?**

The first step to ensuring that the benefits of the initiative cut across everyone is having an already functioning and existing platform that manages the data of the proposed candidates (the unemployed residents in the state). This means that the process of obtaining and uploading the information of the candidate into a database should be thorough so that no one who should be involved misses the opportunity. Also, the medium of disseminating information about the initiative should be able to reach everyone.
How Edo promotes technology, innovations and SME development

A major landmark achievement of his Excellency, Godwin Obaseki-led administration is the “Edo Innovation Hub” established in mid-2018.

Through its skills development arm Edo Jobs, the state partnered tech companies, Microsoft, Tech4Dev, LinkedIn, Curators University, Hotels NG, Markers Academy, Pan Atlantic University’s Enterprise Development Center and Siemens among others to train over 20,000 youths in the entrepreneurship and innovation, data science, digital design, website development and so on. More specifically, the hub offers digital skills, business support services, start-up incubation, business acceleration, mentorship, co-working spaces, and entrepreneurship training. In September 2019, more than 50 youths benefited from the hub as they commenced training on Amazon Web Services.

The state government is working with major stakeholders in Nigeria’s technology space to ensure more high-impact innovations to boost wealth creation in the state.

In 2018, the Edo Innovates tech cluster brought out an initiative titled ‘The Hack Edo Series’ with a prize of N3.5 million; a multi-dimensional initiative to identify and incubate the best ideas that tackle problems of power generation and distribution faced by individuals, businesses and the digital ecosystem.

In the education sector, Edo State launched a program to support teachers with digital content and to empower them to make use of technology to improve performance as well as increased learning. The state with technical support from Bridge International focuses on both pre-service and in-service teacher reforms for these major purposes: First, to provide in-service professional development programs for teachers; to help the government harness data intelligence for effective planning while building institutional capacity to use data; to use technology to deliver quality real-time content to teachers and training them to effectively manage teaching and learning using classroom data collected in real-time. Fourth, to use technology to drive efficient quality assurance systems and helping to build the framework to support teaching.

The projects executed by the wife of the governor, the First Lady, Betsy Obaseki include but not limited to Betsy Obaseki’s After School Club, Trader, and Market Moni Programme, Betsy’s Angels Shelter, Centre for Women Development, Edo Youth Academy, Edo Women for Agriculture and Enterprise, among others. Amongst other things, the first lady presented awards to 36 outstanding women from the 18 local government areas under the Community Mobiliser Award category and also presented the Civil Service Emeritus Award to the retiring Head of service in 2018. Also, the First Lady collaborated with the state chapter of the Medical Women Association of Nigeria (MWAN) to establish a special “Well Women’s Clinic”.

Edo Bits

EdoBits is a digital design academy that was modeled by stakeholders – youth, secondary school leavers, parents, community chiefs – to be unique to Edo residents for maximizing the purpose of the long-term school programme. The goal of EdoBits School is to increase the level of ICT awareness, to provide more pathways to employability, to make youths more socially responsible and is strictly for a defined set of residents who fit certain criteria. At the school, the trainees are taught R programming & Python languages. Abraham Omomoh, a coordinator of Edo Bits shared his experience on the impact the program has had on Edo youths. The coming on board of Edo Bit dated back to 2018 when the state government gave a memo to set up a technology-driven hub. Consequently in August 2018, a co-creation hub was introduced to essentially affect the lives of the underprivileged. For transparent selection processes, community leaders, government officials and the youth were invited to develop the selection criteria themselves—the candidate must be an underprivileged between 16 to 22 years and such must have completed secondary school.

The program which started with 50 students is divided into three modules: web design, development and graphics design. In three months, by the end of December 2018, many of the students started to work as a freelancer to government agencies and companies, while others got permanent jobs.

The one-year program received financial support from Edo Jobs, as well as the supply of system and 24-hours electricity that will impact about one hundred students to increase their chances of employability. The students received moral supports from the state government and the governor himself visited the centre in November 2018.

The students who were encouraged to choose programs that would give them comparative advantage had three courses to choose from. The first course lasted for 8 weeks covering the introduction to computer, the second for 16 weeks, covering the introduction to web development, design and graphics while the third course was stretched over a 24-week duration. Presently, Edo Bits has web designers and graphic designers who are specialised. Obasi Godson and Eze Faith Emmanuela are some of the beneficiaries of Edo Bits who testified and are thankful for the privilege to have partaken in the program. Obasi, a 19 years old SSCE holder from Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State successfully transitioned through the stages of the program and now works as a freelance web developer. Now, he boasts of working with the government agencies, firms in the private sector and earns an average monthly wage of N100, 000. Faith is 21 years old. She shares a similar success story as a beneficiary of Edo Bits and expresses her gratitude to His Excellency, Godwin Obaseki for the opportunity given to her through the training she received at Edo Bits. Faith is now a graphic designer, and as a freelance, her average monthly return is about N50, 000. She advises other states to initiate this type of program to bring more youths out of the street.

Curators University

Curators University, headed by Asemota Izojiwa Precious, program lead is one of the leading partners in Edo Innovation Hub. The university is an institution that helps to teach fourth industrial revolution which is like the current and developing environment that uses disruptive technologies like spark AR, augmented reality, visual reality, data science and artificial intelligence. The aforementioned is changing the way people work and live. Curators University plans to train 10,000 people in data science and artificial intelligence. Whereas the university charges N157, 000 in Lagos and N50, 000 in Akure, the Ondo State capital, for its courses, its programs come at no cost in Edo State courtesy of the state government. At the centre, students are trained in programming languages such as Python and R. Usually, the condition for learning artificial intelligence is that you have to learn the fundamentals of data science. The centre has trained over 400 people.
The Vision Of Governor Obaseki Becomes Clearer- Ugorji

How is Edo State ICT Agency involved in job creation in Edo State?
To be honest with, I don’t think the governor or anyone of us anticipated that Edo Jobs will be what it is today. We wanted to show people, unlike the usual political process of campaigning without clear plans to implement campaign promises, we set out to create data base that can accommodate up to 200,000 or more people that are unemployed, so as to keep our campaign promises. Where the process has gone now, is an eclipse of where it was before. When the governor hired Ukinebo Dare, I think where she is taking it to, none of us ever anticipated it. The vision of Governor Obaseki becomes clearer.

What has happened?
When you check people that are unemployed, some of them have lost hope. The first thing we did was to set a skill development agency that will take these people who are unemployed, and find out their strengths. From the data mining exploration, we found out that some of them are not even educated at such you cannot put them in a normal office work. For those people, we said create an SME part or teach them handcraft.

So, people are given skills on how to be a fashion designer, bead making and others. We keyed into the federal government agenda, when we added the state program to it, it becomes more beneficial. You will find out that our success rate of retaining that program will be higher than any other states.

We have production hub apart from the innovation hubs. That is just the beginning. Technology is helping the process. Some of these people are creating snippets of their own thing, hiring a few people and helping others to grow. That is the snowball effects we talked about. Also, we created the medium of communication across the state; this was made possible by running fibre optics across all the 18 local government areas. This is unlike what we have in Lagos, where different companies or individuals created their own fibres. So, we looked for a way of synchronizing this into one, and this led to the creation of Edo broad band network.

If I may ask, has the broad band project been completed?
Yes. So we want it to go across other parts of the state.

Concerning the fibre optics, like how many kilometres have been covered?
A total of 450km and counting. The impact of this is that there is no school within Benin City that does not have access to fibre optics like 500 meters away. Hospitals, local government head offices, they are now on the snippet. We are trying to do microwave to connect to 15 local government areas outside Benin City.

What business model do you have on ground that will ensure the fibre optics is viable in Edo State?
Nigerians are people that buy things if you give them good products. We have not taken advantage of that. And again, we have created a program that allows any of the service providers to be able to make money. For instance, in Benin City, MainOne did it with Facebook. In doing it with Facebook, MainOne has a bit of subsidy. How are they going to make money? We make sure any requirement from government for bandwidth goes through MainOne. For example, all the MTN, Airtel, Glo and other service providers that use microwave for communications, the Edo State will stop that and ensure they use fibre. And we have told MainOne a portion of their staff must come from Edo Jobs, you must sell the product through people-distributors, who live in Edo State.

In other words, money flows within the people in Edo State. As a matter of fact, I want money to circulate up to three times before leaving the state. Even when I pay people salaries I want them to use it here. I want the services to be used here.

Are they companies that have come up to use this product?
Yes. I will give you a quick one; Edo State is hosting the National Sport Festivals in March 2020. We are also applying to FIFA for under 20 women competition. The stadium that will be used for the competition alone is such a big deal, if we do not do all these fibres stuff we won’t be able to provide that capacity, that is the benefit of vision.

How many jobs have you created so far?
Right now, we have crossed 100,000 in both public and private sectors. That is the milestone we have achieved in that area. With this achievement, the governor is making plans to open up the space so that more jobs can be created by all sectors. With the framework set down already, growth rate in corresponding years will be faster.

What are your challenges?
The economic itself is a challenge. If the federal government is weak the state too is weak. What we are doing is we are seeing ourselves as a sub-national in our economic drive. Security is another challenge. As a businessman, you would want to come to a place where security is reliable because we don’t control all the elements of the security within the state. So, we have to deal with that. The governor’s security architecture is already playing out. The governor knew that without security it would be difficult to woo the big players to set up their companies in Edo State. Those two areas are bigger challenges for us.

Lambert Ugorji, MD, Edo State ICT Agency
Mobicure (Omomi & My Paddi)

MObicure is a digital health company that provides mobile technology solutions to some of the most pressing healthcare problems plaguing Nigeria and Africa. Mobicure was the first startup to move into Edo Innovation Hub facility in 2018. Dr Charles Immanuel Akhimien is a medical doctor and co-founder of MObicure. He is a UN SDG Young Leader, UN SDG Pioneer, Mandela Washington Fellow & One Young World Ambassador.

What is your service all about?

Mobicure is a digital health company. That is, we use digital and mobile technologies to provide health care services. Essentially, we do that through mobile applications, just like your Facebook, WhatsApp, among others. We produce apps like these that you can use to access health.

Mobicure has two products – Omomi and My Paddi. These products target two different audiences. Omomi is for maternal and childcare. First of all, the company started in 2015 and that was when we launched Omomi. Since inception, Omomi has registered over 14,000 users.

One of the benefits of the product is that it provides mothers and expectant mothers with maternal and child health information. It also provides them the means to connect to medical personnel. My Paddi is another product we started in 2018. This product was design basically for young people, to provide them with information relating to sexual reproductive health and also a platform where they can interact with medical practitioners. As a matter of fact, we have 15,000 people registered on the platform already across the country within 14 months. Mobicure has been in existence since 2015, officially moved into Edo Innovation Hub facility in 2018. That was before the introduction of My Paddi. The facility is the first hub in Edo State; this is the first time in Edo State that government has invested heavily in innovation compared to what we have in Lagos and other notable states in Nigeria. And this is paying off already; we currently have 10 employees working with Mobicure including myself. Hopefully within the shortest time, let say in one year, our staff capacity would have increased to 15 to 20 people as long as we keep getting support from the government. Also we give room for internship, at the moment; we have 5 interns currently working with us.

I am a medical doctor and getting medical doctors is not difficult. They don’t come to sit down here, because they have their daily jobs. We basically have them work in shift as we have a pool of them. We make sure at every point in time we have a doctor available. It is across the country; however, we have two or three that are out of the country.

What specific service does Omomi provide?

With Omomi, you can monitor if your baby is growing well. It teaches you how to check your baby’s weight, height and recommend some diet for the improvement of babies. Another thing it does is that Omomi has a vaccination tracker that reminds parents of vaccination dates. One more thing we want to do next year is having hospitals registered on the platform.

How much does it cost to be on the platform?

Registration is totally free. You can download the app for free on Google play store. However, if you want to chat privately with a doctor, that is a paid feature. It will cost you N200 to N5000. On my Paddi, it is N100 more expensive. In this part of the country, healthcare spending has been poor; we try to get them in first and going forward, have them subscribe to any of our packages that suit their needs.

So what about My Paddi?

My Paddi is for young people aged around 16 to 29 years. It is a sexual and reproductive app. This app helps to guide young people through by providing information on sexual related matters. And also, the good thing about My Paddi is that it is anonymous. It keeps private the details of the subscribers.

Since My Paddi platform is for young people, do they pay for the services?

Yes, they do. But it is also very cheap, from N300 to N5000.

When you make prescriptions, do you monitor your client?

There are strict protocols for that. Doctors don’t make prescriptions except on a rare case, because the app is not an alternative to the hospitals. We have cases where we direct them to hospitals where they will need to have physical examination. There is a limit to what we can do on the platform. Essentially, it is to provide health advice.

What should Edo Government do to make businesses such as yours profitable?

They just need to continue investing in innovation. If they build more places like this, where people can come up with creative solutions for healthcare, education or in energy, it will create development and employment opportunities as well and also create an enabling environment for more investment. So far, My Paddi is getting more traction because of demographics. Our mobile app subscribers are put at 15,000. That is an impressive record.
New Digit is Valued at $1 million - founders

Xigma / New Digit

Xigma is deep technological research company that focuses on closing the gap between scientific ideas, applications and commercialization.

Could you please introduce yourself and your company?

My name is Derick Nwasor, I am the founder of Xigma. This is my colleague Odili Michael Authority.

Xigma is a deep technological research company that focuses on closing the gap between scientific ideas, applications and commercialization. We have been applying scientific knowledge to grow up our services, but then, we want to go a step further from just scientific ideas to the commercialization of our ideas. In getting this, we set up a subsidiary company to help us commercialize our idea; the new company is the New Digit Technologies and Michael is the CEO of the company.

What informed the setting up of New Digit Technologies?

We have developed innovations in transmitting electricity wirelessly, producing electricity from water as a practical science concept. Hence, for us to penetrate the market with our innovative product, we created a subsidiary company that can do that, while Xigma continues with research in advanced science. So, whatever has been researched and tested, the subsidiary company puts it in market. That was what inspired us to set up the subsidiary company.

How long has Xigma been in operation?


How has your experience been so far in managing New Digit Technologies?

Since when we got a breakthrough in research, that is, generating electricity through a different channel like – using water to produce electricity, we have gone further to develop the first phase of the project. The idea is to use the product as our minimum viable product to enter the market. The cost of producing the entire system is huge. For instance, generating electricity from water is capital intensive; we don’t have the fund to do that. However, we crafted a part of the product that can provide electricity.

We launched a product recently tagged Powerhouse Nigeria. One of our aspirations is to be the first company to put up an electric car in the market.

Basically, electricity is generated from either hydro (water), thermal and renewable. What makes your products unique?

There is a limit to what I can expose, but I will try as much as possible to be clear. What we do basically is converting the water into a gas which can either be used for cooking or electrifying the house. What makes ours different is that we convert the water into gas; we change the whole process. We break the water into hydrogen and oxygen. It is the hydrogen we are using to cook at the same time to power the house without battery; it works like a washing machine.

Could you give us an estimate of the solar cell market?

Our product comes with solar panel; secondly, we are not restricted to Edo State because we sell across the state and country.

Please can you give us your educational background?

I read industrial physics at the University of Benin.

We first started with a prototype; we did a series of tests before we arrived at the final product. The major impediment we have at the moment is funding to mass-produce; there is no point in producing for just one person where what you produce can be copied. But the minimum by-product we are using to get cash for the day to day running of the business is produced based on demand or before the customer comes.

How much does this product cost?

For 1 kilowatt, it is about N350,000. That is, for the complete package. At present, we are currently giving it out at about N170,000.

What is your team size?

Xigma has about 30 team members while New Digit Technologies has seven members.

If I should pay N170,000 for your product, how much will it save me per month?

Benin Electricity Distribution Company guarantees you 3 hours of power per day but sometimes it could be more. Our system of N170,000 can provide power for at least 12 hours daily. Aside from that, we optimize the house and give professional advice on the best way to use the product, since our system guarantees you 12 hours per day. The solar panel has a life span of 25 years.

How much does your company worth?

New Digit Technologies was valued at $1 million at the last valuation exercise. To really do something significant, we would need funding to the tune of $200,000; about 5 per cent of that.

In the last 6 months, what has been your monthly revenue?

We make about N750,000 on a monthly basis.

How would you describe the support you have received from the state government?

Providing a place like this where people can pay and get a space is one of the great things the state government has done; it is a great idea.
Entrepreneurship And Vocational Skills

Entrepreneurship and vocational skills development occupies a cardinal position in Governor Obaseki’s regime.

After three and a half years, how has this project fared? Niyi Omole who coordinates skill acquisition program at the Skills Development Agency revealed that the program’s success lies in the strong support it received from different partners.

Among the partners are SHE Leads Africa, SABI Hub, SDP, Curators University, LinkedIn, SME Toolkits, Drake University, SLOT, Adedotun Studio, Genius Hub, Industrial Trust Fund and the National Directorate of Employment. Others are LEANA, Law Auto, UNDP, Gidi Jobs, First Bank, POISE, AGDC, IFES, Edo Bits, Mind Your GAP, Yale Fellowship and Gidi Mobile.

Expertise was provided by the above-named partners in areas such as digital marketing, business start-up, employability skills, data science and artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship training, cosmetology, photography and creativity, as well as welding and fabrication, plumbing and pipe fitting.

Others are solar panel installation training, soap making, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, business acceleration training, web and graphic design, fashion design, apiculture carpentry training program, bee farming, paint production, catfish processing and cosmetology, and bead making.

This scheme has succeeded in creating 22,872 jobs between 2017 and September 2019. The highest number of jobs was created in 2018 when 16,075 people benefited from the program. By September 2019, the scheme had created 5,639 jobs while 1,158 jobs were created in 2017.

In 2017, the scheme trained 45 people in business start-up skills; 513 people in digital marketing and 600 individuals in employability skills. In 2018, the scheme trained 257 people in aluminium/POP tiling and catering. More so, 50 got trained in automobile training; 300 people in business acceleration training; and over 2,500 people in cosmetology.

**HP LIFE**

HP LIFE is an acronym for Hewlett Packard Learning Initiatives for Entrepreneurs. It enables students, teachers and entrepreneurs to gain the business and IT skills that help create jobs and stimulate economic growth.

With the ubiquity of smartphones nowadays, one cannot easily deny the huge impact of the internet in driving consumer behaviour. Most brands, irrespective of their sizes, tap into digital platforms in a bid to capture market share. However, being online simply is not enough, at such, brands need to have insights of their consumers’ behaviours; brands need to know how to sell, how to do business, how to set prices and how to handle competition and use that knowledge to drive revenue for their business.

With the help of the Edo First Lady, through the establishment of a technology-driven incubation centre, this has facilitated the way and manner HP LIFE which uses technology simulations, online activities, narrative stories, and dynamic assessment and feedback tools, to keep learners engaged, covering the key business areas of finance, marketing, operations, communication and some special topics such as social entrepreneurship, energy efficiency, effective leadership and strategic planning.

HP LIFE intends to stimulate growth in a declining economy – through consolidating on existing skill acquisition programs and arm beneficiaries with the right tools to build a 21st-century business.

It aims also to create an income stream for people, even those without hard skills by giving them enough soft business skills to excel. And also, to provide a robust technology in which case, each beneficiary can leverage on the immense power of the internet and break the walls of the market, as well as, to effectively link up beneficiaries in the digital services sector with a burgeoning international market.

HP LIFE itinerary to success is simple yet sophisticated and foolproof. The first step will be to increase the learning outcomes for 100,000 people in Edo State by 2025.

Using the shared economic model, it aims to get them to start their very own digital platforms and watch them create wealth for themselves, their families, their communities and their nation.

For a long time, the organisation has been strategically positioned to create technology that would bring about better lives for everyone, everywhere, by reinventing quality learning and digital literacy to help empower people including those that are marginalized and under-served. At the moment, HP LIFE is incubating a number of start-ups, providing them with the technical and educational support needed to fly.
Beneficiaries of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Program

Basically, renewable energy has been projected to be the leading source of power in the world by 2025.

Currently, Nigeria generates a small amount of energy from renewable sources. However, policies and plans have been initiated to expand the energy access to 90 per cent of the population by 2030 and 30 per cent of the total energy supply will come from renewable sources.

For centuries, humans have dreamed of harnessing the power of the sun to energize lives here on earth. Green Fusion is an example of a company that kicked off as a result of the state’s skills acquisition and entrepreneurship program. This section provides an insight into the long term effect Edo Jobs Programs has the founders met during the skills training program sponsored by the Godwin Obaseki’s regime.

With the support of the state government, they have built a business that is empowering and employing others. Since June 2018, Green Fusion Energy Resource, a renewable energy company based in Edo state, in partnership with the Edo State Government has strategically positioned itself to provide clean, affordable and reliable energy through harnessing power from the sun and other sources to electrify homes. Princess Nana Aishat Ikhelowa, MD, Energy Fusion said that Edo State has a huge market for power because the electricity system is not optimal. This is because in most parts of the state, households enjoy about three hours of power supply and three hours off. The solar technology that is available today, even when it rains, could generate electricity. The motivation to go into the project was because after a careful study, Green Fusion discovered that people needed electricity, and thus made it a goal to make that available to all.

She also recalled that before his excellency, Governor Godwin Obaseki resumed office, there was a period when water was a big issue in Edo State, however, through the help of the present administration, today, almost all the buildings in Edo State have access to clean water. In her words: “The goal is to replicate that by making everyone have electricity. Above all, Edo State has an enabling environment for solar business. So far, the government has been encouraging and business has been easy as well.”

Green Fusion Energy resource, one of the beneficiaries of the government skills acquisition scheme, so far, has been able to train and empower 700 people. With an average of 50 people on a monthly basis.

Green Fusion Energy Resource, apart from empowerment program, the company carries out an evaluation on every individual that passes through their tutelage, ensuring they find their footing in the market. Although, it has been quite challenging to convince people to buy into a new product, the goal is to control over 80 per cent of Edo State’s households. “There is something we believe: if we can succeed in Edo State, then we can succeed elsewhere. If we can capture the Edo State market, then we can capture any other market in Nigeria”, Aishat added.
The Edo Food and Agriculture Cluster (EdoFAC) and skills centre is targeted at over 3000 farmers with the full complement of an agricultural training centre in the area. The skills centre which is located in Ehor, Uhunmwode Local Government Area serves as an aggregation ground for farmers to interface with buyers, even as it eases transportation.

EdoFAC, the one-stop-shop for agricultural innovation, provides the platform for aggregators to engage with farmers and negotiate favourable prices for produce, whereby all parties are fairly treated. These aggregators buy farm produce such as cassava, plantain, yam, and pineapples, among others in large quantities from the farmers and distribute them to different parts of Nigeria.

The centre, apart from being a place for agricultural produce, trained youths in other vocations like wielding, shoemaking, computer, food processing, and food preservation, among others. It provides farmers ample space to expand their production as well as contribute to the state government’s food security policy, such that subsistent farmers would have a system to mop up their produce.

Also in 2019, Edo FAC in collaboration with Thrive Agric and Market Development in the Niger Delta (MADE) trained over 1,000 bee farmers on techniques to increase productivity and profitability.

The move above is in line with Godwin Obaseki-led administration which has made agriculture one of the cardinal points of his administration and has started making a significant impact in terms of job creation and by attracting investment opportunities into the state. The volume of investments the state has attracted in the last three and half years came from existing players that expanded operations due to the improving business environment and new players which came into the state’s agri value chain. These players include Nosak Group, Presco, Okomu, Flour Mills of Nigeria, several off-takers, among others.

Produce expected from the various farms include rice, vegetables, palm oil, palm kernel, pineapples, bananas and plantains, fruits of different kinds, just to mention a few.

At the last appraisal exercise, over 10,000 hectares of land in various locations across the state have been cultivated under the agripreneur program. The farms were captured under the state’s agripreneur program. The program prioritises the cultivation of a number of crops, including maize, cassava, and rice. The state also boasts of a fertilizer plant.

Governor Obaseki said during the opening ceremony of the Edo Fertilizer Plant, that the plant was a key factor for engaging youths in the state, especially as it provided the needed input to fast-track agricultural development. The fertilizer plant will further boost the income generation capacity of Edo indigenes.

Due to the nature of some of the produce, the farmers in Agenebode axis of the state have started reaping from their investment by harvesting several metric tons of rice in farms cultivated in partnership with the state government, which provided inputs and technical support during the farming season.

The Edo State Government has put in place a knowledge-driven food sufficiency plan to tackle the challenges of farmers. The government provided avenues to farmers to embrace modern farming practices through technology, improve their farm yields, connect farmers with labourers and enhance their livelihood.
We aggregated farmers into clusters and helped them access loans from CBN - Ofojie

Joe Ofojie, Special Adviser To The Governor On Agriculture, Forestry & Food Security Programmes

Could you brief us about the operations here?
Yes. This is one of our farming operations. This one is entirely a maize field as you can see. A few farmers are here present, they can verify the role of the government thus far. In this field, the state government gave the farmers access to land, access to improved seedlings and access to agro-chemicals. Above all, we gave them access to market.

Is this the first crop or first cycle on this land?
Yes, this is the first cycle. We began to cultivate this land lately due to the rain pattern this year. Usually, we should be able to do two planting seasons here because as you know, maize has 90 days gestation period, but the rain did not come early this year so we could only do one round.

What are your output projections per hectare?
The input supplier did tell us that we could get up to twelve (12) tons per hectare, but we are taking a more conservative expectation at around 4 – 6 tons per hectare. A ton then could then be priced at about N80,000 — N130,000.

...and the costs of producing a hectare amounts to how much?
Well, the cost of producing an hectare amounts to about N288,000. Each farmer is given a loan of about N1.3 million at 9 percent interest rate.

What role did the state government play in this project?
What the state did was basically to aggregate the farmers, put them into clusters and also helped them access the commercial agric credit loans from the Central Bank. The state government guaranteed the loan on behalf of the farmers. The state government also entered a strategic partnership with NIRSAL which brought in the agronomists to ensure that the farmers are compliant to standard agro-practices. The state government also intervened in the provision of improved seedlings, agro-chemicals and all other inputs. And the state also solicited on behalf of the farmers for mechanization services. In fact, the state government was involved through the entire stages even to the stage of first fertilizer application, the farmers needed only to tend their crops and consult the agronomists when the need arises. We also assist in executing a combined harvesting over the entire farmland and link the farmers to the off takers.

Could you put figures around how much jobs have been created on this single farm?
We have about 145 farmers here tending to 5 hectares. However, they too would employ or bring in more people to assist them through the stages of tinning, application of fertilizers, weeding and harvesting. These processes require different skillset and different individuals to carry out the operations. By our guesstimates, we would be employing one person per hectare which in all comes to about 6 persons per hectare.

It is quite a distance from the towns to the farms.

Are there any arrangement for housing around the farms or as close as possible?
The standing rule is that the farmers must reside within 4-5 kilometres to the farms. So we aggregate the farmers that reside in close proximity.

What are the qualifying criteria that the farmers must fulfill to be eligible to participate in the scheme?
First, farmers must reside within 5 kilometres from the farms. Secondly, farmers must have a name consistent with their Bank Verification Number (BVN) and a valid phone number. Farmers do not have to be indigenes or natives of the land; it is enough to reside within the state, close to the farms.

So what is the return to the state government to sustain this scheme over the long run?
The state takes no return. It is a like an agric subsidy born out of the commitment by the state governor to increase the productivity of farmers in the state. The governor promised to make millionaires out of farmers and this is a way of fulfilling that promise. For instance, the cost of operating each hectare is about N1.3 million, and our target proceed is N2.7 million. The difference is entirely the farmer’s return. The government is not in partnership with the farmers, so there is no expectation of settlement or repayment.
Beneficiary Of Rice Farming Program

This Is The First Time We Experienced Mechanised Farming In Warrake Town- Ibrahim

Suleiman Ibrahim, Rice Farmer

Could you please introduce yourself?
My name is Suleiman Ibrahim.
I am from Warrake Town in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State.

How long have you been in the business of rice farming?
I have been into rice farming for more than six years. In the last three years, Joe Okojie the SA to the Governor on Agriculture visited our farms and he saw a lot of problems we had on the farm. So, he promised us that by the grace of God, the governor would come to help us cultivate the land in preparation for mechanised farming. We thought it was a joke. But to our surprise last year they brought in some tractors to clear the field. They were able to cultivate up to 198 hectares, although the initial plan was 500 hectares. The heavy rains prevented the tractors from cultivating more than that because some areas are waterlogged. They brought us two trailers containing inputs such as seeds, herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers worth millions of naira. Again, they brought the tractors to do the planting and harrowing. We have done the planting and applied MPK fertilizers. We are about to start urea application.

How old was the farm when the MPK fertilizers were applied?
It was two weeks after planting that we applied MPK.

How old is the farm now?
It is one month and two weeks old now. The agronomist has advised us to start the application of the urea because they will start to develop flowers.

How much did you pay before the government allotted land to you?
We paid nothing to government. It was a support programme from government to the farmers.

How many people do you employ per hectare?
It is a mechanised farm. We started employing workers after the government had cleared the land on our behalf. We used to have about 15 to 20 persons working on the entire field, but per hectare, we have about 4 to 5 workers per hectare to apply fertilizers, herbicides, etc.

Based on your experience, how many bags did you harvest in the past per hectare?
We used to have one sack of 300kg. So, we got maximum of five and half of that bag. When we mill a bag we get about two to three 50kg bags from the 300kg bag. And when multiplied by 5, will give about 15 to 17 of 50kg bags of rice.

What kind of rice variety did you plant back then?
It was a local rice variety called repairer. But the government has introduced us to FARO 44.

Have you seen any difference?
There is a big difference because the gestation period for the local rice variety is up to five months, while FARO 44 is just three months. So, if we are able to do it very early that means we can plant twice in a year which is not possible with our local rice.

What do you say about this new development?
It is a wonderful development and we don’t know how to thank Governor Obaseki because since I was born, I have never experienced something like this in this place. At first, it was like a joke to us that government was coming to help farmers free of charge. We were surprised to see bulldozers come into the community to help us because we know how much it costs to rent a bulldozer a day. This is the first time we experienced mechanised farming in Warrake Town.

In the past, how much did it cost to rent a bulldozer per day?
We have not rented a bulldozer before. But I am aware it cost about N200, 000 per day.

What advice do you have for the people out there who believe government doesn’t keep its promises, but you are now convinced that they do keep promises. So what’s your advice to the youths out there?
Like we used to tell them here in Warrake that we have seen a different government, although past administrations might not have fulfilled their promises to the people. But the support they gave to farmers in this community is a manifestation of the sincerity of the current administration.

We specially thank SA on Agric, Prince Joe Okojie because he was the one we actually saw physically here. So, when he promised us, came and followed it up, it was more like a magic to us. So we are telling the youths that whoever thinks that the government is not working should come to Warrake Town to see for themselves what is happening.
Unemployment is no doubt a worry for any government or the people. The unemployment margin has continued to widen due to the geometrical growth in our population. No doubt, this often has adverse effects on the population and the economy but it is not enough to lament while ignoring the minutest way to provide solution. By Q3 2018, the statistics of unemployment had increased to 25.1%, from 19.6% recorded same quarter of the previous year. The underemployment rate, however, declined by 1.06 percentage points from 19.5% in Q3 2017, to 18.4% in Q3 2018. The labor force population of the state was estimated at 2,095,235 and increase of 116,032 from Q3 2017. This increase still didn't cut down the rate of unemployment.

Prior to this time, private sector operators like Nosak Group through their investments in agricultural fields had continued to deepened activities to migrate the state from a core civil service state to a manufacturing economy with the establishment of Saturn Farms Limited for the purpose of oil palm plantation and milling. Beyond having returns on investment, the group's primary focus was to contribute to making the state an industrial hub for oil palm plantation and production. In a correspondence from the Executive Chairman of the Group, Toni Ogunbor, the establishments in Edo State was to show the group's commitment to complement the efforts of state government in creating jobs for the people through agriculture with a move from subsistence practice to commercial agriculture on large scale cultivation.

The chairman noted that to cut down the high rate of unemployment in the country with focus on Edo State, Nosak Group scaled up investments in agriculture to create jobs for the people to have a livelihood as agriculture stood out to be one of the most evident ways of addressing the high unemployment rate in the state.

Nosak Group operates oil palm plantation fields sitting on a total land area of over 1,300 hectares located in Ukhiri, off Benin/Abrak Express and another existing plantation field of over 450 hectares of land in Obagie, both suburb communities in the state capital. Speaking on the employment created, the plantation manager, Saturn Farms Limited, Victor Egharevba disclosed that the plantation fields, which record an average yield of oil palm fresh fruit bunch (FFB) estimated at 105,882 per annum have made provisions for employment opportunities for the citizens. The company boasts of over 30 employees in the administrative affairs and over 200 employees including permanent and contract staff managing the day to day running of the fields.

Outside the plantation, the group has a 5-ton per day milling plant that processes oil palm into crude palm olein employing about 30 personnel who man the operations of the mill. The crude olein from the mill serves as raw materials to the vegetable refinery, Nosak Farm Products Limited located in Lagos. It is a 200 metric ton per day refinery that produces refined vegetable oil, refined bleached and deodorized olein (RBDO), stearin and palm fatty acid distillate with an average of 60,000 metric tons of refined vegetable oil per annum.

To continue in the reduction of the unemployment ratio of the state, Nosak Group has also ventured into making huge investments in backward integration to expand the oil palm plantations with the acquisition of over 13,000 hectares of farm land for the cultivation of new oil palm fields. This has created jobs for about 100 contract staff who maintain the pre-nursery stage where over 400 seedlings have been planted. Added to this, Nosak Group as the leading player in the ethanol manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy with her strategic business unit, Nosak Distilleries Limited, has a drive to further promote economic development in Edo State with focus on Edo State, which will be converted to raw ethanol for processing. With plans to establish the entire value chain in cassava processing and its derivatives, the Managing Director, Nosak Distilleries Limited, Osarodine Omogola explained that the cassava plantation would see the creation of well over 200 jobs for the people of the state. "Labour is the most vibrant factor of production, which combines with other factors to have a successful operation. We will latch on the unemployed in the state to drive the plantation and the processing of cassava to ethanol as well as other derivatives from the tuber," Omogola said.

Nosak Group has a drive to foster an environment of success that supports and promotes economic development in Edo State serving the market demands in Nigeria and neighbouring countries in the coast of West Africa.

About Nosak Group

Nosak Group is an indigenous business with diversified operations in foods, agribusiness, distilleries, logistics, financial services and real estate across the West Africa sub region. It was founded in 1985 as a commodity trading company in Kano, northern Nigeria, by Toni Ogunbor, Nosak Agencies Limited, as it was known then. The Group later diversified into agribusiness with investment in oil palm plantation in 1991. This singular decision led to a string of successes including the vegetable oil foray and in part, accounted for the establishment of Alcohol Company of Nigeria Limited (ALCONI), now Nosak Distilleries Limited, a pioneering ethanol manufacturing company in Nigeria that has become a key identity of the Group.
Edo Creative Hub Opens To Business

The Nigerian creative industry has the fastest growth rate in the world, accounting for a modest rate of 2.3 per cent, approximately N239 billion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016.

As activities in the sector expand, the potential of the creative industry is further boosted to sustain the growth into the foreseeable future. Considering the impact of the creative industry to the Nigerian economy, the Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki through the State Skills Development Agency, Edo Jobs and the Edo State Investment Promotion Office in partnership with the Market Development in the Niger Delta (MADE II) and Trace TV, has finalised plans to open up the state to opportunities and attract investment from Nigeria’s booming creative industry players, investors and also create jobs in the state through the Edo Creative Hub.

The Edo Creative Hub is one of the governor’s initiatives to exploit the creative energy of the youths and give them the opportunity to create wealth and gain expression. By bringing this to reality, the governor made a provision for the construction of the Edo Film and TV Village, essentially, this would help the state to tap from the job and wealth creation opportunities in the entertainment industry and also engage youths, build local capacity and rejuvenate the state’s creative industry as well as preserve the state cultural heritage.

The hub is structured in a way that it houses different segments of entertainment such as studios, set design for movie production and post-production activities. The project has received the support of international donor agencies and development institutions especially the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID).

“We want Edo State to regain its space of being that hub for movie production in Nigeria. We have so much going on in movie production in Nigeria, they make about 1000 movies in Edo State every year only 20 per cent of them get sold while the rest is uploaded on YouTube. We are currently working with Edo Film Academy to see a way of designing a platform through which we can promote Edo as a movie shooting hub. And again, we are giving grants to almost 10 movies on the conditions that the movies have a market already like the local TV, Africa Magic and the cinemas are ready to buy them.

“This grant will help them get the right equipment that will meet up with the market standard. Essentially, if the movie produced here are of quality standard; it will attract more people to the state to come and make movies. This has a ripple effect on the Edo State economy. We are training young people on how to be a cast crew, and this is part of the requirement for our grant as a new museum in Benin City (Benin Royal Museum) where a permanent display of Benin art works from European and Nigerian museums will be shown. The development of the new museum in Benin City is a step in the right direction as all the listed European and Nigerian partners will contribute from their collections on a rotational basis. The agreement is that all the parties will work to a three-year time frame for the delivery of a permanent display of the historic arts of Benin, including some of the most iconic pieces.

The Benin Dialogue Group set up a committee composed of representatives from the European museums (Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK); Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin; British Museum London; NWVW, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Edo State Government and the Royal Court of Benin. The Steering Committee is to drive forward the decisions made in Leiden by the Benin Dialogue Group.

International Development (DFID).

70 per cent of the crew member must be young people you have trained and engage them to employment opportunity in that sector”, Rufus Idris, DFID portfolio manager said. In addition, the state government is also ensuring that a state-of-the-art museum is built in the state to make

Philip Shuaibu, Deputy Governor of Edo State

Edo State a one-stop shop for players and investors in the creative industry.

On 19 October 2018, at the National Museum of World Cultures, The Netherlands, the Benin Dialogue Group agreed to a number of proposals towards the establishment of a new museum in Benin City (Benin Royal Museum) where a permanent display of Benin art works from European and Nigerian museums will be shown. The development of the new museum in Benin City is a step in the right direction as all the listed European and Nigerian partners will contribute from their collections on a rotational basis. The agreement is that all the parties will work to a three-year time frame for the delivery of a permanent display of the historic arts of Benin, including some of the most iconic pieces.

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**Edo Production Centre**

The Edo Production Centre is an initiative of the current administration in Edo State led by Governor Godwin Obaseki.

The centre is meant to drive industrial development in Edo State, provide job opportunities for youths and improve the state’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since inauguration, it has transformed the state’s light manufacturing sector by attracting more small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to the facility, revamping the state’s light manufacturing sector and providing jobs to residents. Hitherto, a lot of materials and products came from outside of Edo State. The manufacturing base in the state was therefore weak. That situation affected productivity and employment which manifested in the form of high unemployment rate in the state, and consequently led to mass emigration and a rise in social vices. It was that apparent vicious cycle that made the governor to initiate programs that would catalyse manufacturing and thus provide means of livelihood and gainful employment to the people of the state. The Edo Production Centre, until now, was a range of derelict and decrepit buildings from which the state magistrate courts operated. It once housed the Edo State Printing Press. Today, it is a hub for local artisans and small scale manufacturers who rely on the complementary skills and products of the others to make their own output. The centre seeks to tackle the issue of electricity, rental prices and product visibility. It provides manufacturers and producers with the stable electricity needed to facilitate their processes. It also allows for shared spaces so that the rental price per space would be less cumbersome, and because of the hub effects, it attracts clients, potential customers within and outside the state, given the crafts of the manufacturers increased visibility and by effect, increased revenue.

The effort of the Edo State Government in ensuring inclusive, well-supported and structured informal sector through the new initiatives is swiftly paying off. It has become a thing of necessity across all level of governance to grow the informal sector of the economy and to reduce the high level of unemployment that characterizes the country at large.

**Individual SMEs/ Sectors at the centre**

The players at the centre are not restricted to any particular sector: they range from welding and fabrications, to polyethylene production, and bronze casting, fashion designing, carpentry, shoemakers, and others. The target is the small and medium scale entrepreneurs who struggle daily with avoidable business frictions such as electricity, workspaces, high-end equipment and other necessary facilities that increase efficiency. The end goal of the initiative is to empower the SMEs within the state to increase productivity and employment.

"It is been really wonderful being here", Benedict Onaiwu, a furniture maker, said. "I would say that this initiative is especially different from what we have seen in this part of the country. For the period that we have been here, a whole lot of things have been working in the right direction, especially for electricity which is the selling point of this project. For you to go into manufacturing, electricity is one of the major things that are needed. And it is one thing that has been taken care of to a good extent in this project. "Apart from that, the structure that characterizes the country at large."

"Today, it is a hub for local artisans and small scale manufacturers who rely on the complementary skills and products of the others to make their own output."
When asked by the Business-Day Research team on the impact of the government intervention, he said his experience and others SMEs at the centre has been wonderful.

“The experience here has been an amazing one because we have a governor that takes initiative. For instance, I learned about the development of this place through a friend that the state government was initiating a production centre where artisans would be brought together in a cluster, aided by the government to minimize some of the constraints encountered by these artisans, especially, finance and electricity which are the two major challenges for any business.

We need both to be able to meet clients’ demand. We could not finance the equipment and machinery for our production processes. Now, all that have been covered in this single initiative of the governor: the problem of electricity has been settled as we have uninterrupted electricity at the centre. In the development of this production centre, we were asked what we wanted; we were asked precisely how much we would like the annual rent to be. We were carried along through the stages and hence the success we see today. All that we wanted and recommended were implemented”, Michael said.

In the same manner, Alohan Stanley, a polythene producer also added:

“The development of the Edo Production Centre is a good one by the governor especially as we have access to a constant power supply. So, with the issue of the cost of power taken off our shoulders, we are able to expand production and employ more people as you can see here. Currently we have a total of 12 polythene producers resident here”, Stanley said.

“Financing is still a drawback for material input in order to increase production. However, we have welcomed a number of financial institutions including the Bank of Industry(BoI) which came to see what we have on ground and to device an intervention scheme for us”, he added.

“So far, we have had a number of government officials come with the media to do documentation and the Bank of Industry came as well to find out what we would need to facilitate our operational function. The challenges I have now is to increase the number of machines that I have, because of the growing interest of people that want to learn cloth making, especially, children wear” Joan Okogbe, a fashion designer at the Production Centre responded to questions from BusinessDay Research team.
Our Key Mandate is to Help Attract Over £10 Million Investments Into Edo State - Rufus Idris

My name is Rufus Idris. I am the portfolio manager for the DFID, that is the UK Aid funded program called Market Development in Niger Delta (MADE). I am actually leading the Edo State investment portfolio component. That component is mainly to help Edo State build its capacity on how to create opportunities for vulnerable people in the state.

We all know about the issue of human trafficking and regular migration. So, many people have been affected by travelling to Europe, going to Libya through the desert; crossing the Mediterranean Sea and dying in the ocean. That is what the UK Government seeks to address it.

We are looking at sectors such as agriculture, entertainment, beauty and fashion, renewable energy, wholesale and retail trade, and ICT. In all these areas, we will also see a government that is committed and dedicated to doing something new and that is opened to a more private sector-led approach to solving the problem; and also opened to see how we can attract investment to Edo State. This is part of our key mandate as a program is to help attract over £10 million investments into Edo State within two years.

The most important unit that we partnered was Edo Jobs. With Edo Jobs, our focus was on ICT intervention, which is the Edo Innovates. We provided them the technical assistance at the beginning on how the hub should look like and how it should be established. We also went beyond that to give them support on expert in that field to serve as the interim hub manager for six months. After the first six months, we saw growth on how they have gone from zero tenants to almost 95 per cent tenancy rate, from tens of young people to thousands of them going there for different training programs. We have seen the likes of Uber coming to the state.

Another area we partnered Edo State is the Edo Production Centre where a lot of SMEs are put together to have shared space, resources, access finance and to be able to tap into the 24 hours power supply. We also helped with finding some of the MSMEs that are there now, working under our MSME Business Development Support Intervention. We were able to get people that could provide the support that small businesses need like: accounting support, legal support, marketing support, nearness to market support, branding support, regulatory support, licensing, certification, SON certification, among others.

We also partnered Edo State Investment Promotion Office. The governor wants to attract investments but they must have an office that interfaces with investors. It also helps to simplify the regulations and policies that investors would like to know before they come in to invest here and also to create that enabling environment that can make an investment survive or thrive in the state.

On human trafficking, we work efficiently with the taskforce to create awareness on the dangers of travelling through the desert or through any illegitimate means. Currently, Edo State is getting so much attention from international bodies. A lot of them working here are private sector people that understand the language those institutions and investors want to hear to make them invest here.

How possible is it to place a count on those who have been helped?

Our focus in Edo is to be able to reach 30,000 people within two years. We started this program sometimes in April 2018 and it will end in February 2020. In the last quarter when we did a count of our outreach program with most of our partners; it amounted to about 18,500 beneficiaries at different interventions and programs across agribusiness, access to market for rural producers, skills development initiatives, micro retailing initiatives, feed finishing initiatives, beekeeping initiatives, roadside cleaning and some other ones that we are doing. The first cycle started with forty of them being financed with up to N200,000.

We also have waste to wealth initiative where we are training Edo youths on how to excel in waste recycling. You do not have to go on the street to handpick nylon or plastics but you can have a strategic means like the placement of a trash container in a mapped areas; so, that you can attract and make money in companies that are investing in waste recycling. For instance, one can collate nylon from different cold rooms and sell them for cash. There is an app that can help link a seller and a buyer. When you gather the waste; you can contact a buyer through the app.

Also, we are launching our entertainment intervention. We have so much going on in movie production in Nigeria; they make about 1,000 movies in Edo State every year only 20 per cent of them get sold while the rest are upload on YouTube. We are currently working with Edo Film Academy to see a way of designing a platform through which we can promote Edo as a movie shooting hub. This has a ripple effect on the Edo State economy.

You target to attract up to £10 million worth of investments in the next two years, so far how much have you attracted?

We have a company which processes cassava into ethanol. They produce like 50,000 litres of ethanol everyday and a huge amount of cassava will be needed. They have already invested millions of pounds in ethanol processing.

“After the first six months, we saw growth on how they have gone from zero tenants to almost 95 per cent tenant rate, from tens of young people to thousands of them going through there for different training programs.”
MainOne Produces Techpreneurs, Enhances Connectivity In Edo State

In a collaborative effort to groom a skilled generation and produce techpreneurs in Edo State, the Edo State Government, in partnership with MainOne, West Africa's leading connectivity and data centre solutions provider, recently celebrated the successful completion of 100 Edo youths in data science and artificial intelligence.

The training program was implemented through Coven Works (an American company) and a leading firm in data science and artificial intelligence education in a four-week intensive training boot-camp at Edo Innovation Hub, Benin City, Edo State.

Coven Works through its training arm – Coven Labs to train more than 100 youths in data science and artificial intelligence in Edo State and over 950 people across Nigeria with the goal of bridging the technological skill gap amongst African youths, especially Nigerians.

The intensive 30-day program focused on building talents in data science and artificial intelligence, as it opened new possibilities in data analysis and critical thinking skills focused on the tackling of societal and industry problems, and seeded techpreneurs and job seekers with new skills.

MainOne’s leading pan-African network reaches more of West Africa than any other network directly and through its partners. Its managed state-of-the-art next-generation IP network offers direct-line connectivity to customers in 8 countries across West Africa. MainOne has agreements with national, regional and global operations to ensure total national, regional and global reach as may be required by its customers. Its advanced infrastructure is powered by Cisco’s IP NGN platform designed with a high degree of resilience with diverse routes, pro-active network monitoring and performance management on a 24x7x365 basis. MainOne's IP backbone delivers advanced traffic-engineering functionality, rapid fault restoration and multi-service transport abilities/services.

The training program aligns with the efforts of the Edo State government to create more jobs in the state and increase the state of job-readiness of youths in Edo State. The coming on board of MainOne as a partner-sponsor was a catalyst to drive a common vision of providing in-demand skills to selected youths in the community.

Dunsin Fatuase, director of programs at Coven Works, commented on the program: “The training program which focuses on turning out talents in data science and artificial intelligence in itself is focused on the application of these skills in tackling societal and industry problems. We believe it is a full package—using one stone to kill as many birds as possible. The training boot-camp also aligns with the vision of the Edo State Government to create a sustainable ecosystem for the development of technology and innovation which in turn would foster job creation and reduce the rate of unemployment amongst the youths.

Feedback from the previous cohorts has been heart-warming and positive. One of the trainees from the last cohort reiterated how he had acquired skills that have made him an employable person; others talked about their new remote jobs with firms outside the country. And so the list goes on and on. Having taken into consideration all the previous cohorts, the Edo cohort is bound to surpass its previous success records.

Further, MainOne recently launched its services in Edo State, with extensive fiber infrastructure deployment across Benin City beneficial to improving the quality of internet access and accelerating digital transformation by providing improved connectivity services. The reseller program is expected to drive the connection of small businesses to the network, even as MainOne is already connecting government offices and major commercial venues in the city to the network. MainOne believes this infrastructure will create a better internet experience for junior data & AI engineers in their learning and remote working activities.

The head, Edo Jobs, Ukiyebo Dare said that in a world that is dynamically transforming due to the evolution of science and technology, a tech-based skill set is all the more essential.

Olusola Amusan, founder and CEO at Coven Works, is of the opinion that the stage has been set with the training of residents of Edo State in data science and AI, however, there is so much more to be done. Coven Works is a pioneer of the vision to transform the African space through data science and artificial intelligence technology.

The chief executive officer (CEO), MainOne, Funke Opeke applauded the state’s drive towards developing a digital ecosystem that would empower the next generation of youths with the right tools to become and remain an asset to the world. She expressed her happiness to partner Edo State Government to create a sustainable ecosystem for the development of technology and innovation in Edo State.

Managing Director, Edo State ICT Agency, Lambert Ugorji, was impressed by MainOne achievement and he captured his feelings thus: “We appreciate Governor Godwin Obaseki’s vision to futuristically transform our state and it is my pleasure to say that Benin City is the only city across Nigeria that has the most fibre spread across the city. The next stage for us is to get youth empowerment, to get people placed in jobs where they can use the skills they have acquired. I am privileged to say; this is just the beginning”.

And with the way and speed of transformation in Edo State, one will but agree with Lambert Ugorji, that truly, this is just the beginning in Edo State.
Call to action: There is room for everyone

Ukinebo Dare, head, Edo State Skills Development Agency has this to say with regard to the next steps and potential areas of partnership:

“We are grateful that the vision of Godwin Obaseki is yielding much fruit for the people of Edo and even more so, to our partners including private institutions, international bodies and donor agencies. Our mission remains to attract the demand of highly skilled talent in Edo State and to provide the supply of that talent. This is the time for organizations that are seeking to make real impact to come on board. Edo State has never had a leader more passionate about the development of the people than our current governor, and all the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are involved in one way or the other.”

As of now, various groups have partnered the state to improve ease of doing business, develop manpower and attract investments. These include the Bank of Industry (BoI), GIZ SKYE program, DFID(MADE), the European Union (EU) and many other bodies such as the Forum for Edo Advancement, Association of Esan Professionals and so on.

The state is blessed with the following qualities and resources:

- Prudence, accountabili-
- ty, and transparency make the Edo State Government one of the most efficiently run in Nigeria with positive policy outcomes and incentives that support investors. The state is also endowed with abundant mineral and human resources as well as which have attracted blue-chip investors like Pan Ocean, Dubri Oil, Okomu Oil Palm, Presco Oil, Guinness Nigeria, NPDC, Uber, Facebook, among others.
- Edo State is the safest location for residential and commercial activities in the South-South sub-region. With good use of technology, the Edo State Government has created an Incident Management System called SIMA (Security Incident Management Application). With the help of this tool, security agencies are well equipped with information to stop security threat even before they happen.
- With a youthful and agile population receiving excellent skills training though Edo Jobs, Edo State is ready to satisfy your human resource needs across all areas of specialization and in every local government area of the state.
- Having supported recruitment drives for organizations such as First Bank Nigeria, Union Diagnostics, Sigma Pensions and Axa Mansard, the Edo State Skills Development Agency (Edo Jobs) considers that access to highly skilled manpower is one more reason to bring your business investment to the state.
- The work being done to create jobs can be supported in many ways, businesses at Edo Innovates and at Edo Production Centre need mentorship, training, funding (grants, investment, and low interest loans), modern equipment, and most of all access to larger markets. We need support to scale up these projects”, Dare said.

The State Government is also looking to support businesses willing to invest in food processing and storage within Edo.

- With an estimated 1.1–1.6 million hectares of arable land and favourable ecological conditions, Edo State is well aware of its agricultural potential, so much it generates 40% of its revenue from agricultural proceeds. Existing research institutions in the state include the Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR) and the Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria (RRIN) making headway in the oil palm and rubber research respectively.
- With daily flights to the economic nerve center (Lagos) and the political capital (Abuja), an extensive road network with other parts of Nigeria, Edo State has an innate logistical advantage. Benin is a central town on the route for road travel between the North, West, East and Southern regions of Nigeria; Benin enjoys an excellent network of internal roads.
- The state has committed to contractual obligations in excess of $1 billion for roads and drainage upgrade and development in preparation for required urban population expansion and dwelling comfort; the state has also invested in mass transit air-conditioned buses that ply most of these roads.
- In the area of teaching, the State Governor is already re-acting basic education through EDO-BEST that has generated study tours from various governments including the Rwandan Government that paid a visit to Edo State to study the model. The ultimate goal is that there will be a pool of youth in the state and Nigeria with the right skillset to support the long term drive for Edo to become the industrial capital of Nigeria and West Africa.

From this standpoint, it is expedient for well-meaning organizations to support the transformational drive by the Godwin Obaseki-led administration. There are roles for everyone, from impact investors to donor agencies, financial institutions and well-meaning Nigerians. There is room for everyone to make an impact.
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