

Written evidence submitted by VSO (IRN0006)

Introduction

VSO is an international development agency with 60 years' experience of addressing poverty and disadvantage through our unique approach of working through volunteers. By working closely over time with carefully selected partners, from grassroots organisations to government ministries, volunteers provide the right support to help ensure that local development efforts deliver the greatest impact and lasting change.

We have worked in Nigeria since 1961, strengthening inclusive education systems and supporting people to develop secure and resilient livelihoods. In this time, we have worked across all 36 of Nigeria's administrative regions, with all of our projects and programmes harnessing the energy and expertise of volunteers to deliver on development across Nigeria. In this response, we will focus on areas where we believe we have evidence, drawn from our programming and with extensive contributions from our Nigerian practitioners, which can provide meaningful responses and recommendations to the FCDO as it considers the future of the UK-Nigeria relationship.

What are the emerging opportunities for aid and investment in the science and technology sectors in Nigeria? How should the FCDO encourage investment in these sectors, including in small and medium sized enterprises?

1. As of 2020, youth unemployment in Nigeria was at 14 per cent, and research by Baah-Boateng¹ concluded that a major cause remains that *"youths do not possess the particular skills required by companies, this becomes a challenge in recruiting them."* One way in which the FCDO can invest in and support the development of the science and technology sector in Nigeria, and the growth and development of small- and medium-sized enterprises, is through supporting the education provision that will equip the next generation of Nigerians with the skills to work in, develop and grow these sectors.

¹ Baah-Boateng (2016): The Youth Unemployment Challenge in Africa: What are the Drivers? P.147

2. This will involve the improvement of skills in science and computing, but also the basic building blocks of numeracy and literacy needed to access technical and professional roles. With a literacy rate of 62% for those aged 15 and over, increasing to 72% for those aged between 16 – 24², it is clear Nigeria has made great improvements in its education provision over recent years, but that there is more work to do to ensure every young Nigerian attains a good level of literacy and numeracy. In 2019, Vice-President Osinbajo also recognised the need for greater levels of digital education across Nigeria, saying, *“educators, policymakers, the private sector, and students [must] come together to deliberate on how a conducive quality environment can be created for innovation in e-learning to thrive in Nigeria. And how our institutions can effectively adapt to technology to suit its effective curriculum”*³.
3. VSO has decades of experience in running education programming in Nigeria, and have recently run education programmes focused on digital learning, on improving the quality of numeracy teaching and on improving science education, with a particular focus on targeting girls. We also work in partnership with the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education to deliver teacher training, training teachers in more effective and inclusive teaching methods, and helping educators to develop teaching resources in low-resource settings to improve the provision in schools.
4. Drawing on the success of our ‘Unlocking Talent through Technology’ (UTT) programme in Malawi⁴, the transfer of our UTT programme to Nigeria is boosting outcomes in Maths and English provision through the use of tablet technology. Still in its pilot phase, and currently running in five schools, we hope and expect that UTT in Nigeria will be able to replicate some of the outcomes it delivered in Malawi: boosting learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy substantially and closing the ‘learning gap’ between boys and girls in the classroom.⁵ VSO has also run a programme of ‘Mobile Science Labs’, which worked to improve science teaching in

² Data from UNESCO (2018), available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ng>

³ <https://venturesafrica.com/vice-president-osinbajo-believes-e-learning-is-one-way-nigeria-can-resolve-the-challenges-in-its-education-sector/>

⁴ More information can be found at: <https://www.vsointernational.org/our-work/inclusive-education/system-strengthening/unlocking-talent-through-technology>

⁵ Scottish Government Malawi Development Programme 2015-2018 End of Year Report – Part 1 of 3, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/transparency-data/2018/08/malawi-development-programme-2015-2018-year-three-reports/documents/m-15-e-012---unlocking-talent-through-technology---year-three-report/m-15-e-012---unlocking-talent-through-technology---year-three-report/govscot%3Adocument/M-15-E-012%2B-%2BUnlocking%2Btalent%2Bthrough%2Btechnology%2B-%2BYear%2Bthree%2Breport.pdf>

schools across the Northwest region⁶, with a particular focus on Katsina where the rate of girls failing science subject at schools in rural areas was very high. Schools in Nigeria often lack resources for science teaching, and our mobile science labs brought laboratory equipment to schools to assist with science lessons and trained recent science graduates volunteers to support teachers in delivering lessons in schools. The programme succeeded in reaching 7,500 students across 15 schools and trained Nigerian volunteers and educators in more learner-centred teaching methodologies, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that several girls whose schools were visited by 'Mobile Science Labs' went on to study science subjects at university.

Recommendation:

- **The FCDO should recognise the role of education provision in the development of the science and technology sectors within Nigeria, and work with the organisations which provide this. This should involve improved teacher training methods, the provision of teaching resources, and improvements in digital literacy, with a focus on closing the gap in learning outcomes between boys and girls, and between the most and least advantaged pupils.**

What opportunities and challenges do the UK's historic links with Nigeria pose when considering the future partnership between the two countries?

5. British NGOs like VSO have been active in Nigeria since Independence, with VSO active in the country since 1961. This is a source of British influence in the country and in the wider region, which Britain should seek to build on as we look to the next chapter of the UK – Nigeria

⁶ More information can be found here: <https://www.vsointernational.org/news/blog/lab-on-wheels-bringing-science-to-northern-nigeria>

relationship. Through organisations like VSO, the UK has sent international volunteers to Nigeria to assist with the country's development for seven decades. They have taught in schools, volunteered in medical facilities and helped to train and built capacity across institutions in Nigeria.

6. Since 2011, international youth volunteering in Nigeria has been an important source of cross-cultural learning and exchange between young Brits and young Nigerians, strengthening the UK – Nigeria partnership⁷. Between 2011 – 2020, the International Citizen Service (ICS), run by VSO in partnership with other respected development organisations, ran 19 cycles of youth volunteer placements across Nigeria involving 996 young people. In these placements, young British people aged between 18 – 25 volunteered alongside young Nigerians in communities across Adamawa, Cross River, Kano, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Nasarawa, Osun and Enugu states, on programmes related to health, inclusive education and livelihoods.
7. ICS created a cohort of outward-facing global citizens, connected by a belief in what UK aid can achieve overseas, working to build national capacity through the engagement of communities and individuals volunteering for development. ICS volunteers are the community, business and political leaders of tomorrow, and by volunteering together and learning from each other through ICS, have created new bonds that span the world, which will shape Britain's trade, aid and political links with countries including Nigeria over the coming years and decades.
8. Since 2019, Nigeria's 'National Youth Engagement Network' (NYEN), facilitated and supported by VSO, has mobilised young Nigerians, many of whom are former ICS alumni, to volunteer for development in their own communities. NYENs were set up in order that national ICS volunteers, inspired by their time volunteering through ICS, could continue to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals in their own communities, and to continue their journeys as active citizens. Youth volunteers bring particular strengths to development work, particularly in the realm of peer-to-peer education and attitude change, and the Nigerian NYEN has most recently been involved in advocacy around food security policy and developing an action plan

⁷ More information about ICS can be accessed at: <https://www.volunteerics.org/sites/default/files/2021-ICS-Final-Report.pdf>

for the implementation of a National Volunteer Policy.

Recommendations:

- **The UK government should recognise the role played by British and Nigerian volunteers, facilitated and supported by British NGOs, in contributing towards Nigeria’s development, and commit to a longer-term strategic partnership with volunteer-supporting organisations as part of its strategy for implementing the Integrated Review in Nigeria.**
- **The government should commit to the reinstatement of ICS, or a similar youth international volunteering programme, to resume when conditions again allow for international travel. This will facilitate a new generation of young Brits and Nigerians to volunteer together for Nigeria’s development, helping to boost the links between our two countries, and to contribute to Britain’s soft power across sub-Saharan Africa.**

By what mechanisms could the UK government support trade and private sector development in Nigeria and stimulate investment?

9. Economic development is a complex process involving a range of public and private sector actors, and in, some cases, support from NGOs who can train and upskill people to widen their opportunities to access and create sustainable livelihoods. VSO has run a range of livelihoods programmes in Nigeria, such as ‘Improving Market Access for the Poor’⁸ (IMA4P), which worked with rural and marginalised farmers to improve the skills and knowledge required to respond to changing environmental and market conditions. In order to do this, international and national volunteers delivered training sessions in their expertise areas to co-operative groups and individuals, helping farmers to increase their yields and grow their businesses. IMA4P worked with farmers to diversify their crops, protecting against market shocks and allowing them to

⁸ More information can be found here: <https://www.vsointernational.org/our-work/resilient-livelihoods/resilient-rural-livelihoods/supporting-poor-farming-households-to-make-a-sustainable-living>

develop alternative revenue streams. The programme used technology as an enabler, provide access to machinery that reduces the labour needed for agriculture, making it possible for older farmers to care for their land.

Recommendation:

- **The UK government should invest in funding NGO programmes that support livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and social and financial education across Nigeria, which will help to boost the growth of the private sector and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.**

How should the FCDO take account of and mitigate potential inhibiting factors to investment (such as corruption, security, human rights abuses)?

10. Corruption is a deep-seated and historic issue in Nigeria, and amongst a range of other ill effects, it is also a factor inhibiting investment into the country. NGOs like VSO can have a role to play in tackling some of these issues, and in promoting attitudes of active citizenship and a commitment to more accountable governance amongst the young people who will be Nigeria's leaders of tomorrow.
11. Within VSO's youth engagement work, we work to equip young people with leadership skills, and support them to engage with bodies including UN Volunteers, and we are looking to engage our youth networks further with bodies including the African Union and ECOWAS. This will work to connect a cohort of young Nigerians to regional and global institutions based on the principles of democratic and accountable governance, instilling in them the belief that at whatever level, governments should be open, transparent and accountable to the people they serve.
12. Our young volunteers have also been involved in helping communities hold their governments to account on the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with youth volunteer networks working to inform communities of their government's obligations towards them to

deliver on development outcomes. This is helping to promote and spread the idea of accountable governance and has in some cases has led to the building of new facilities in communities which lacked them.

13. Active citizenship and personal development were core elements of the ICS programme, and a stated objective within the business case, as follows: *“Through the training provided and the placement experience volunteers will develop key life skills and greater personal and social responsibility. All volunteers will be encouraged to use new skills and experiences to become active global citizens and to be advocates for development issues in their own communities and beyond”*⁹. This applied equally to British and national volunteers, with all ICS volunteers facilitated to become more active citizens, both in their own communities and globally, thanks to their participation in the programme. Hundreds of young Nigerians participated in ICS, helping to create a cohort of young people engaged and empowered to contribute to positive social action in Nigeria, many of whom continue to do so through participation in VSO-facilitated youth networks.

Recommendations:

- **The FCDO should support NGOs working on social accountability programmes across Nigeria, and fund grassroots initiatives which are pushing for more accountable and transparent governance.**
- **The FCDO should commit to a future international youth volunteering programme along the lines of ICS, involving the participation of national volunteers in countries such as Nigeria, to help promote active citizenship amongst Nigerian youth.**

1. ⁹International Citizen Service 2012 – 2015 Development Tracker
<https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-202883/documents/>

2.

2 June 2021