

INFRASTRUCTURE CONCESSION REGULATORY COMMISSION



BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING YOUTHS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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Opening

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, respected colleagues, partners in development, and most importantly—the resilient, ambitious, and unstoppable youths of Nigeria,

It is both a privilege and a responsibility to stand before you today to speak on a theme that strikes at the very heart of our nation's future, **"Breaking Barriers: Empowering Youths towards a Sustainable Future."**

This theme is not just a conversation point. It is a declaration. A declaration that we can no longer speak of development without youth, we can no longer plan for the future while excluding the very generation destined to inherit it.

Setting the Context: A World in Transition

We are living in a world marked by uncertainty and transition. The climate is changing, resources are depleting, and traditional models of governance and growth are being tested. Yet within this turbulence lies a golden opportunity—an opportunity to rethink how we build, whom we include, and what we prioritize.

Globally, young people are rising. They are coding solutions in remote towns, creating climate innovations in underserved communities, and reimagining entrepreneurship in ways never seen before in many parts of the world.

Nigeria stands today at a critical juncture—demographically, economically, and politically. With one of the largest youth populations in the world, and with youth comprising of about 70% of our population, we possess a tremendous demographic advantage. Globally, there are over 1.3 billion young people, and Nigeria accounts for a significant share of that number.

This is not just a statistic—it is a strategic asset. Our young people are not only the future; they are the present drivers of innovation, resilience, and transformation.

Yet, despite this promise, many of our youth remain trapped beneath layers of systemic barriers—barriers that limit access to quality education, financing, meaningful employment, and participation in decision-making. These are not theoretical abstractions; they are lived realities—visible and invisible walls that mute their voices, suppress their potential, and shrink their space in the national discourse.

Let me be clear: **the exclusion of youth is not only unjust; it is unaffordable.** No nation can advance sustainably when more than half its population is left behind in the name of “experience” or “seniority.”

A Shift in Paradigm: Government Commitment to Youth Inclusion

Let me now acknowledge, with clarity and sincerity, that Nigeria is beginning to experience a refreshing shift—one that recognizes youth not merely as future leaders, but as present contributors.

It is encouraging to note, however, that we are beginning to witness a refreshing shift. The current administration has taken conscious steps to integrate youth into the heart of governance and nation-building.

Youth have been appointed as ministers, special advisers, board members, and heads of critical institutions. These appointments are not mere tokens or symbolic gestures—they are a powerful signal that Nigeria is learning to place trust in the competence, integrity, and capacity of its young people to lead and deliver.

I, the very presenter of this speech, am living proof of this new vision. My appointment as a young leader at the helm of a national regulatory institution like the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) is not an anomaly—it is a reflection of a growing belief in the dynamism of Nigeria's youth.

And it does not stop there.

Those who know the ICRC can attest that the highest percentage of my team is made up of young, capable professionals—brilliant minds who are not only passionate about the Commission's mandate but are helping to drive reforms, shape policy, and redefine what it means to deliver on public-private partnerships with excellence and innovation.

Youth as Catalysts for Sustainable Futures

When we speak of sustainability, we often refer to environmental policies, infrastructure durability, or economic continuity. But sustainability, at its core, is about people—and particularly, those who will carry the baton forward.

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world. This is not a liability; it is a strategic advantage. A nation blessed with such vibrant, dynamic youth has no excuse for stagnation—unless we choose not to invest in them.

Our youth are not waiting to be saved. They are building, coding, leading, and reimagining the future across every sector—from fintech in Lagos to agro-innovation

in Kaduna, from renewable energy startups in Anambra to civic-tech initiatives in Abuja.

They do not need charity. What they need is access, trust, and opportunity.

Breaking Barriers: From Words to Action

So how do we move from intent to impact? How do we break down the walls that stand between our youth and the future they deserve?

Let me offer four concrete pathways:

1. Education that Empowers, Not Just Informs

- Our schools and universities must move from theory-heavy models to skills-based, innovation-driven learning that equips youth for the future of work, including in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and public service delivery.
- We must overhaul our curricula to reflect the realities of the modern world—embedding digital skills, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking into every level of learning.
- Education must prepare young people to solve real-world problems, not just pass exams.

2. Enabling Policies for Access and Inclusion

- Youth quotas in policy-making bodies should no longer be symbolic—they should be **strategic and measurable**.
- Regulatory frameworks must be reimaged to accommodate youth-led startups, cooperative models, and green enterprise.

3. Technology as an Equalizer

- Digital platforms must be leveraged to democratize access to information, governance, education, and finance.
- Government, private sector, and civil society must invest in digital literacy and innovation ecosystems that are youth-centric.

4. Equity and Justice in Implementation

- We must ensure that rural youth, young women, and marginalized groups are prioritized—not as afterthoughts, but as stakeholders.
- Diversity should not be a box to check—it should be a lens through which all youth empowerment initiatives are designed and implemented.

A Shared Future: Youth and Nation-Building

Let me say this emphatically: **Nigeria's greatness lies not only in its natural resources—but in its human resourcefulness.**

A nation that fails to empower its youth is a nation walking toward the future with its eyes closed.

But imagine the Nigeria we could build when we choose to open those eyes:

- Where young people are partners in designing infrastructure, not just passive users of it.
- Where sustainability is not a Western buzzword, but a local solution designed by local minds.
- Where the line between age and agency is replaced with bridges of mentorship, innovation, and trust.
- Imagine a nation where young people co-create development plans; where they lead infrastructure innovation, manage sustainable energy systems, and serve as digital ambassadors for e-governance.

Imagine a Nigeria where leadership is not determined by age, but by vision, competence, and service.

This is not a distant dream—it is **within reach, but only if we act deliberately, inclusively, and boldly.**

Conclusion: The Power to Break and Build

Let me leave you with this thought: **Barriers may be built by history—but they are broken by courage and intention.**

They fall when leaders choose inclusion over exclusion.

They crumble when institutions choose trust over tokenism.

Today, I see in this room a generation ready to break those barriers.

A generation that does not ask for pity, but for partnership.

A generation not waiting for change, but becoming the change.

To every young person listening—**You do not need to wait to be part of the future. You are the future.**

Let us work together to break the barriers, to unlock your potential, and to empower you not only to dream, but to build the sustainable Nigeria you deserve.

Thank you.

God bless the youth of Nigeria.

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.