Office of the National Librarian /CEO

WALKING THE BRIDGES INTO THE FUTURE: A SCORECARD OF AN EVENTFUL TENURE AS THE NATIONAL LIBRARIAN/CEO

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR CHINWE VERONICA ANUNOBI, NATIONAL LIBRARIAN/CEO, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE END OF HER FIRST TENURE AND COMMENCEMENT OF SECOND TENURE 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2026 AT THE CONFERENCE HALL OF NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS (NBS).

"The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way" - Marcus Aurelius

Protocols,

1. With a heart full of gratitude to God, I welcome you all as we mark five years and the end of my first tenure and commencement of my second tenure as the National Librarian and Chief Executive Officer of this great institution, the National Library of Nigeria.

2. As you are all aware, this journey began in September 2021, when I was appointed to lead this institution. Shortly after my assumption of office, we developed and rolled out the 8-Point Agenda, which became our blueprint, our compass and our guide for navigating the repositioning of National Library of Nigeria for greater relevance. From the beginning, I understood that an agenda, no matter how well conceived, remains only a plan until it is translated into action by people. I therefore recognised very early that the most important resource available to the National Library was not technology, infrastructure or even its collections, but its human capital. The men and women who would give life to the vision and this has remained fundamental to our journey so far.

3. By the second year, we spoke of "Building the Bridge" as a pathway for delivering the eight-point agenda. By the third year, we had begun to

walk on that bridge, aligning our operations with new platforms and innovative approaches to service delivery. By the fourth year, we were holding firmly to the mandate, while deliberately expanding our engagement with the new generation and reaching communities that had historically remained outside the immediate reach of library services. Today, as I stand before you at the completion of my first five-year tenure, I believe we have come far enough to pause, look back and ask ourselves a fundamental question: what have we really built, and what difference has it made? The answer, in my view, is that we have not merely introduced projects; we have progressively strengthened an institution.

4. Let me begin with the people – my amazing staff members, because every achievement we are celebrating today has a human being behind it. From the outset, I have always maintained that technology can provide the tools, policies can provide the framework, and strategies can provide the direction, but it is people who ultimately determine whether an institution succeeds. For this reason, our investment in human capital was not an activity outside the eight-point agenda; it was the enabling condition for the agenda itself.

5. Over these five years, we have therefore paid deliberate attention to staff development, professional competence, recruitment, career progression, welfare and exposure to emerging practices. We have sponsored staff for capacity-building programmes, strengthened digital competencies, supported participation in professional engagements, expanded specialised training and continued to develop the capacity of our staff to operate in an increasingly digital and knowledge-driven environment. We have instituted a reward system for outstanding staff through a special incentive process.

6. The progress recorded in digital transformation provides perhaps the clearest evidence of this. The National Repository of Nigeria, the National Virtual Library, automated cataloguing and indexing tools,

online ISBN and ISSN services, the Online Public Access Catalogue, e-legal deposit, newspaper locator and other digital services did not emerge merely because technology became available. They emerged because members of staff were willing to learn, adapt and apply new competencies to the work of the National Library. Across the period, the records show sustained investment in human capital through capacity-building, recruitment, professional development and digital literacy. In all, 198 new staff were recruited, 453 promotions were recorded, 86 staff benefited from study leave, and 38 benefited from conversion or upgrading. The recorded training activities also account for 498 participants, alongside the wider professional development and digital literacy initiatives undertaken during the period. For clearer appreciation , this engagement is derived from about 645 staff strength of the NLN.

7. The accreditation of CALIM, the progression of its Diploma programme and the remodelling of the Centre, including the provision of standard hostel accommodation, are also part of the human-capital story. We are not simply training people to occupy positions; we are seeking to build a professional workforce capable of responding to the changing nature of librarianship and information management.

8. My concern for staff has also extended beyond professional development. We have continued to address staff welfare within the resources available to us, we have supported some ailing staff members. We have also enhanced the salaries of outsourced staff and provided funding for the repair and sustenance of staff buses. We have continued to pursue staff promotions and career progression as part of our responsibility to ensure that people who give their productive years to the institution enjoy job satisfaction.

9. The introduction of the Performance Management System is another important dimension of this process. As I explained during my fourth anniversary, PMS is not intended to be punitive; it is a mirror through which we can see ourselves clearly, understand what is expected of us and improve our performance. It is ultimately about task and delivery, and about ensuring that individual responsibility is connected to institutional results.

10. Having established that foundation, permit me to return to the eight-point agenda with which we began this journey. At the time, these eight points were a response to the challenges and opportunities we identified

in the institution. Five years later, they provide us with a useful framework for assessing how far we have travelled.

11. The first is digitisation and the development of the National Repository of Nigeria. Our objective was to preserve Nigeria's documentary heritage while making it accessible beyond the limitations of physical location. Today, the National Repository has grown into an important component of our digital knowledge infrastructure. The National Repository now contains 2,454 items, while 1,514 rare and weak-resource titles, amounting to 167,505 pages, have been digitised. These figures are more than numbers; they represent a deliberate effort to preserve Nigeria's documentary heritage and make knowledge that might otherwise have remained fragile or inaccessible available for future use.

12. The second is the National Virtual Library, through which we sought to extend the reach of the National Library beyond its physical walls. The platform has continued to expand the reach of the National Library through electronic resources, with 5,512 e-resources harvested during the period covered by the departmental records, alongside the provision of current-awareness and other virtual services. This is a significant shift in the philosophy of library service—from waiting for the user to come to the library to taking knowledge closer to the user wherever that user may be.

13. The third area is automation and the modernisation of our professional and operational processes. Here, we have continued to introduce tools and platforms that improve efficiency, visibility and access. The Newspaper Locator, e-legal deposit platform, ISSN application, increased metadata entry in the OPAC and the representation of Nigerian literature on Wikidata are some of the developments recorded. We also moved Nigerbiblios onto the Open Journal System platform in accordance with international standards, while exploring collaboration to advance the journal towards Diamond Open Access. These developments demonstrate an important principle: digital transformation is not simply about putting existing processes online; it is about rethinking the way an institution creates, manages and delivers value. That distinction has guided our approach over these five years.

14. The fourth area is the enhancement of our branch libraries and the improvement of the library environment. We understood that a National Library cannot fulfil its national mandate if its presence is strong only at the centre. Our branches remain our beacons of hope in the states, and we

therefore continued to improve their physical and digital environments. Branches in Niger, Jigawa, Kwara, Cross River and Kogi received renovation attention, while internet services were extended to Lagos, Kaduna, Enugu and the FCT. We also continued to pursue alternative power solutions as resources became available beginning with Enugu , Imo ,Lago and FCT where we have deployed alternate power to some extent.

15. The fifth point is literacy sensitisation, indigenous language documentation and cultural preservation. In this area, we have increasingly recognised that the National Library's responsibility extends beyond books and conventional library services. We produced the Map of Nigerian Indigenous Languages and the Compendium of Alphabets and Numerals of Nigerian Languages, provided training in CALIM to stakeholder on documentation of family history using indigenous languages, collaborated with UNESCO on the documentation of disappearing indigenous languages in Taraba State, and established a committee for the documentation and preservation of Nigerian family history. These initiatives speak to a deeper responsibility. A nation that does not preserve its languages, memories, family histories and intellectual heritage risks losing parts of itself. The National Library therefore has a responsibility not only to preserve what Nigerians publish, but also to help preserve the knowledge systems and cultural expressions through which Nigerians understand themselves.

16. The sixth agenda is the promotion of literacy and reading culture. Over the period, we strengthened our Readership Promotion Campaign and worked through our state branches and partners to take reading beyond the traditional library environment. Across the period, our readership and literacy interventions expanded considerably, with 148 book clubs and 99 literacy centres supported through the state branches, while the Readership Promotion Campaigns and related outreach activities reached large numbers of Nigerians, including 127,781 beneficiaries recorded in the campaign data supplied for the period. This is particularly important to me because the National Library must remain relevant to the realities of our population. Our responsibility is not merely to preserve books for those who already read; it is also to help create the conditions under which more Nigerians can read, learn, acquire skills and participate meaningfully in the knowledge society.

17. The seventh agenda is reaching the hard-to-reach communities. This has perhaps been one of the most socially significant dimensions of the agenda. We deliberately moved beyond the assumption that library service

should be defined by the physical location of a library building. Through our outreach activities and Readership Promotion Campaigns, we have taken literacy, reading materials and learning opportunities to communities that are distant from conventional library facilities. The records also demonstrate sustained attention to hard-to-reach communities through our outreach and readership activities, reinforcing the principle that our national mandate must continue to be interpreted in terms of people rather than buildings.

18. The eighth is the strengthening of our partnerships and the repositioning of the National Library as a national and international knowledge institution. We have increasingly recognised that the challenges confronting libraries today are too complex for any institution to solve alone. Consequently, we have built and renewed partnerships with national and international organisations, including UNESCO, the United States Embassy, the Bulgarian National Library and other professional and development partners. My tenure partnership engagement was crown with signing MoU with Qatar national Library at Busan South Korea on August 12, 2026.

19. The establishment of the first NLN-hosted Window on America in Katsina, our collaboration with UNESCO on indigenous languages, the renewal of international cultural cooperation and our partnership around online legal deposit are examples of how the National Library is becoming more visible within the wider knowledge ecosystem.

20. I must also report that the National Library of Nigeria celebrated her 60th Anniversary from 14th-20th November 2024 through a series of colourful and impactful activities including match to and prayer in our permanent site which God has answered. This was undertaken in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders. The anniversary provided a unique opportunity not only to celebrate six decades of the institution's contribution to Nigeria's intellectual and cultural development, but also to reflect on the changing role of the National Library in a rapidly evolving knowledge society. Knowledge and Information were deliberately placed at the heart of the celebration, underscoring the enduring truth that access to reliable information is fundamental to education, research, innovation, informed citizenship and national development. The activities therefore brought the National Library closer to the public, celebrated its achievements and heritage, strengthened stakeholder engagement, and renewed our collective commitment to preserving Nigeria's documentary heritage while ensuring

that knowledge remains accessible to present and future generations. Excitedly , the 60th anniversary celebration ushered in our 2025-2030 Strategic, launched at the celebration , bringing in a fresh page to our mandate . It was to become the fulcrum around which the plan and targets of the operations and services of the NLN were built leveraging the five strategic objectives.

21. Also worthy of mention is the strategic technical partnership with Boldscholar Research Ltd, an indigenous educational technology company, which has provided a range of digital services and infrastructure to the institution free of charge, including the crawling harvesting and preserving NLN e- legal deposit submissions, and Cataloguing-in-Publication records, the ongoing digitisation of the National Library's historical ISBN records with over 37,000 records already captured and uploaded in the ISBN verification platform, deployment of Ford Foundation-funded e-library facilities at our Enugu, Sokoto and Abuja Area 2 Centres, each equipped with computers, solar power, internet connectivity and access to digital resources. This partnership has therefore contributed meaningfully to our digital transformation agenda, while strengthening access to bibliographic resources, the preservation and accessibility of Nigeria's intellectual & publishing heritage.

22. When these achievements are viewed separately, they may appear to be different projects undertaken at different times. However, when viewed analytically, they reveal a much more coherent transformation. The investment in human capital enabled digital transformation. Digital transformation expanded access. Expanded access strengthened literacy and research. Literacy and outreach increased our engagement with communities. Cultural preservation deepened our national relevance. Partnerships expanded our institutional reach, while the emerging sustainability initiatives are designed to ensure that these gains can be maintained. In other words, the eight-point agenda was never eight isolated activities. It was an interconnected institutional transformation.

23. This is why the statistics that we are presenting today should not be seen simply as performance figures. They are evidence of movement—from physical to digital access, from isolated services to integrated platforms, from institutional visibility to community engagement, and from dependence on traditional methods to a more innovative and partnership-driven model of service delivery. The public service records alone show 236,627 user registrations and 610,462 resources consulted over the reported period, demonstrating the scale of engagement with the institution.

24. When I look at the journey from 2021 to this fifth anniversary, I am convinced that the most important achievement is not any single platform, building, programme or number. It is the gradual emergence of a National Library that is more confident about its mandate, more willing to innovate, more connected to its users and increasingly conscious of its role in Nigeria's knowledge economy.

25. Let us now glance at the cumulative data, which provide a broad statistical picture of how far we have come during the period under review:

26. The available departmental records show the breadth of this transformation: 89,195 ISBNs were issued, 3,072 ISSNs were issued, 27,502 legal-deposit titles comprising 158,980 volumes were received, while 22,718 titles comprising 121,302 volumes were processed and sent to branches. Our publications and collection-development efforts also added 18,075 titles and 57,451 volumes to the National Library holdings during the reported period, while 5,512 electronic resources were harvested and 1,826 social-media posts were recorded across the platforms covered by the departmental data.

Five Years Completed: A New Beginning

27. To the Glory of God, against all odds and amidst some daunting challenges of human dynamics and vested interests who were bent on truncating what God has destined, I am able to complete the mandate of 5 years and in His wisdom 5 months ago the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria , His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu (GCFR) renewed this mandate. It is just simply put, a renewed hope. I am not taking this privilege and opportunity to serve our dear nation for granted but rather I am offering to serve with renewed vigor and energy hoping that God who made it possible the first time will continue to light the way for more success.

28. The agenda that guided the first tenure remains the compass, but the next phase will deploy the agenda for the realization of our five strategic objectives of Digital Transformation; Cultural Preservation; Literacy, Research and Lifelong Learning; Sustainability; and Institutional Capacity Building as outlined in the 2025 – 2030 strategic plan.

29. The next five years must therefore be a period of consolidation, institutionalisation and sustainability. We must move from establishing

platforms to strengthening them; from initiating programmes to measuring their long-term impact; from acquiring competencies to institutionalising them; and from depending largely on annual public funding to building additional and sustainable sources of support.

30. It is in this context that the establishment and forthcoming launch of the National Library of Nigeria Endowment Foundation is particularly significant. The Foundation is intended to provide a sustainable mechanism for mobilising support for collection development, digitisation, conservation, technological modernisation, literacy, professional development, infrastructure and other strategic institutional priorities.

31. The deployment of a unified digital user-registration application across all National Library branches, which will enable users to register once and access NLN services across the branch network through a centralized user database will commence in earnest. This will enhance seamless access to services, improve user management and data collection, facilitate accurate tracking of readership and service utilization, and provide the institution with reliable data for planning, monitoring and decision-making.

32. Our permanent Headquarters also remains a major aspiration. We have travelled a long and difficult road with this project, but recent developments have demonstrated that God answered ourNovember 2024 that anniversary prayer that the National Library of Nigeria will ultimately have a befitting national home. We remain grateful to the President, His Excellency President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (GCFR) and his dear Wife, Her Excellency, Senator OluremiTinubu CON and the Honourable Minister of Education Dr. Maruf Tunji Alausa for their commitment towards the completion of the building.

To My Colleagues

33. At this point, I want to speak directly to you.

34. Five years ago, I came into this institution with a blueprint. I did not come with the expectation that I would personally accomplish everything contained in it. I came believing that, together, we could unlock the potentials that existed within you and by extension the institution.

35. There have been difficult days. There have been days when resources were inadequate, when infrastructure constrained our ambitions and when circumstances tested our collective resilience. We have also lost

colleagues along the way, and their absence reminds us that institutions are built by people whose individual lives and contributions matter deeply. Yet through all these moments, the work continued.

36. I have seen staff travel long distances to reach communities, work beyond normal hours to deliver programmes, learn technologies that were initially unfamiliar, represent the National Library at professional and international platforms, maintain services under difficult conditions and continue to believe in the institution.

37. I therefore say to you today: I see you, I appreciate you, and I am grateful for your sacrifices.

38. Our responsibility in the next five years is not only to demand more from our human capital; it is also to invest more deliberately in it. We must continue to strengthen professional development, digital competencies, career progression, welfare, performance management, leadership development and succession planning. An institution that wants to remain relevant must continuously renew the knowledge and capabilities of its people.

39. The National Library of Nigeria is greater than any individual who occupies an office. What we are building must therefore be strong enough to outlive us individually. Our greatest success will be when the systems we establish, the knowledge we create, the competencies we develop and the institutional culture we nurture continue to produce results beyond our tenure.

Conclusion

40. Five years ago we set out with an eight-point agenda. We have built bridges, walked on them, strengthened them and used them to reach places that were previously difficult to reach. We have introduced new technologies, developed new services, strengthened our branches, expanded literacy activities, preserved aspects of our cultural heritage, deepened partnerships and, most importantly, invested in the people who made these achievements possible.

41. Today, as I complete my first tenure and begin the next chapter of this journey, I do not see this anniversary as an end. I see it as a point of reflection, renewal and greater responsibility.

42. We are not gathered merely to recount the difficulties we encountered along the way. We are here to examine what we did with them. We chose to turn challenges into opportunities for reflection, criticism into motivation for improvement, and obstacles into reasons to work even harder for the institution we serve. Perhaps this is what Marcus Aurelius meant when he observed that what stands in the way can become the way.

43. The mandate remains the same, but the environment in which we operate has changed. The Nigerian population is becoming younger, technology is transforming how knowledge is created and consumed, artificial intelligence is redefining information services, and the demand for reliable, accessible and inclusive knowledge has never been greater.

44. We must therefore remain innovative, but we must also remain grounded in our professional values. We must embrace technology without losing the human dimension of librarianship. We must preserve the past while preparing for the future. We must serve those who are already within our reach while deliberately seeking those who remain unreached.

45. Above all, we must remember that no institution can rise above the capacity, commitment and integrity of its people.

46. I remain grateful to Almighty God for the grace to serve, to the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the confidence reposed in me, to our partners and stakeholders for their support, and to you, my dear staff, for standing with me through these five years.

47. With you, I have been able to stand tall in defending the National Library of Nigeria and her personnel. With you, we have demonstrated that even within constraints, progress is possible when there is vision, commitment and collective responsibility. With you on my side , we will do exploits. It is not about the size of input you make at a time but your consistency and commitment along the track of your call to duty. I may not fully see and appreciate as much as you expect but the unseen rewarder who I call upon your life and family will surly fill the necessary gaps and surprise you with the unimaginable . Thank you for being there for me, for the national Library and for Nigeria

48. As we enter the next five years, let us not become complacent because of what we have achieved. Let us become more determined because of what remains to be achieved.

49. The bridge has been built. We have walked on it. Now, we must strengthen it, widen it and ensure that it carries many more Nigerians into the future of knowledge.

50. May Almighty God continue to guide us, strengthen us and bless the National Library of Nigeria.

51. For the National Library of Nigeria, the best is yet to come.

52. Thank you, and God bless you all.

Prof. Chinwe V. Anunobi
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