

# #NMC2020:

## NEW MEDIA & VOICE: PEOPLE, ACTION & HASHTAGS

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the **New Media, Citizens and Governance Conference** was held in a challenging period when the continent battled with concurrent events, including a pandemic, a demand for an end to police brutality in Nigeria and protests in Namibia among others. As stated by the compere, **Tolulope Adeleru-Balogun**, "2020 has tested us individually and collectively. In a year that has been like no other, Nigeria has been tested; and amidst this, many young people found that they do have a voice, and they can affect change."

This unusual atmosphere rightly set the tone for an enlightening conversation that fits into the conference's theme - *People, Action & Hashtags*. The hashtag has become the symbol of dialogue and a tool of advocacy. However, there is still a challenge of whether it ever stimulates action in a continent where apathy to governance abounds daily. Nigeria witnessed the biggest protests since #OccupyNigeria, and this unit of conversation can be narrowed down to #EndSARS. The hashtag has become a rallying tool for the oppressed, a voice to the silenced, and energy to everyone trying to demand

a society that works for all. #NMC2020 had 16 speakers from 4 African countries with thematic experiences on justice, accountability, social mobilisation, media and marketing. It was a gathering of friends who are seeking answers to the complex dynamics of a young continent that seeks to assert itself and chart a new direction while struggling to break free from the grip of the old order. The theme of the conference can be summarised in four lessons.

### 1. All Voices Matter

There is an emerging consensus that expertise on issues in the world of information glut is not about those who can theorise the problems but those who, in audacity, offer solutions. As rightly said by **'Gbenga Sesan** in his opening message, "This is the conversation we are having today. The good news is that these conversations will be led by people who are not only experts but people who have lived the experience."

The arrival of new faces such as **Rinu, Feminist Coalition, Debo Adebayo (Mr Macaroni), Bertha Tobias** and other voices establishes that leadership in the civic space belongs to all and these voices matter in

New Media, Citizens & Governance Conference

4<sup>th</sup> edition of New Media, Citizens & Governance Conference (NMC20G). A pan-African conversation.

17 SPEAKERS

5 Countries  
Cameroun, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria and United States

119 PARTICIPANTS

9 Countries  
Estonia, France, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States

the end. The hashtag is not a commodity of private ownership but a standard utility that can be easily raised when individuals step out in courage. As the outrage evolves into action, we find lessons that our strength and safety are not in lone voices but in rallying the collective.

### 2. It's Not Just New Media; Free Speech is under Assault

There are many concerns about the clampdown on new media, but a keener view shows that this is still the old tactics of restricting free speech, expression and silencing advocates. Whilst the government might have immobilised the mainstream media through their regulatory control of frequency and restrictive rules, they are still perturbed by the unrestrained space that social media affords its citizens. As **Chioma Agwuegbo** noted, it is

without shame that governments from Tanzania to Nigeria not only carve obnoxious laws they also work with the private sector to shut down the internet, block websites and conduct overreaching surveillance. This is the battle that old media contended with in the past, and social media will not be different.

"When we talk about social media, we're talking about many platforms, but we should also think about social media as it relates to press freedom. Social media is often restricted in places where the government or authorities are looking to shut down conversations or reduce press coverage of certain issues," noted **Jonathan Rozen** during his session.

The consensus on the first panel was that we need to build cross-border partnerships across new

SPEAKERS



'Gbenga Sesan  
NIGERIA  
Co-host



'Yemi Adamolekun  
NIGERIA  
Co-host



Seun Onigbinde  
NIGERIA  
Co-host



Tolulope Adeleru-Balogun  
NIGERIA  
Compere



Ayeni Adekunle  
NIGERIA



Bertha Tobias  
NAMIBIA



Chioma Agwuegbo  
NIGERIA



Debo Adebayo  
(Mr Macaroni)  
NIGERIA



Grace Githaiga  
KENYA

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media (digital rights campaigners) and old media (journalists) - and confront the monster in the room, that is, the intentional evil act of stifling voices. As poignantly mentioned by **Noah Ajare**, "we need to sustain this network of friendship to ensure effective monitoring, just like Paradigm Initiative and a host of others are doing. If anything happens anywhere in the continent, we can be sure that others would raise the alarm and come to the aid."

### 3. Self-cleansing Power of Social Media

The frank talk on social media also comes with challenges. This has been a lame excuse for governments to introduce retrogressive laws. We are in an era where the velocity enabled by social media has been used to foster bigotry, racism, tribalism and also spread misinformation. The mutual acceptance that the government should control social media is never a way to go because such lines get blurred in the end.

"I was asked in an interview a few days ago if social media should be regulated, and my answer remains an absolute no. However, the companies who create social media platforms need to be as accountable the same way we want to hold the

government accountable," **Zeal Akaraiwe** pointed out.

Accountability must be inherent on media platforms. A glaring example that needs to be rapidly multiplied is Donald Trump's treatment by Twitter, a permanent ban for a divisive voice with influence to cause incredible offline damage. Regarding silencing mainstream media organisations, social media has become society's truth meter. With the massive distrust in governments, we must do all to protect them.

### 4. Issues are Connected

We are in a society bedevilled by many issues, and from the streets of Lagos to Windhoek, we are all asking questions that route back to institutional accountability. This was evident in the #EndSARS protests that quickly evolved into a broader call for governance reform. As a frontline #EndSARS activist, **Rinu Oduala** noted that democracy is about accountability and good governance. Restricting citizens' rights to speak up is tantamount to breaking the democratic laws of a country.

In **Bertha Tobias's** words from Namibia, corroborated by **Tolulope Adeleru-**

### #NMC20 THROUGH THE YEARS

2012  
**Tools and Trends\***  
May 14 - 15  
\*Hosted by EiE Nigeria, Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation & Galaxy Backbone as the New Media and Governance Conference.

2016  
**Rights and Responsibilities**  
October 26 - 27

2018  
**Government, New Media & Civic Spaces**  
October 24 - 25

2020  
**New Media & Voice: People, Action & Hashtags**  
November 26

October 2022

**Balogun**, "there is a strong, distinct wind of change arising because of the #ShutItAllDown hashtag in Namibia. I asked Rinu about social change, and she agreed that the #EndSARS movement is birthing a social change in Nigeria. Many people do not want to call it a protest because it's much more than that. It is about bad governance. It is about accountability."

**New Media, Citizens and Governance Conference**, a biennial project of leading non-profit organisations - **BudgIT**, **EiENigeria** and **Paradigm Initiative** -- was

a melting pot for ideas on the intersection of new media, social change and evolving demand by young people. Young people will continue to raise their voices and show uncommon courage to demand a better society. The Gen Z generation is ready to apply technology to organise and beat the centralised coercive system's restrictions to demand a continent that offers value to its people.

As we continue in the walk, we must emphasise to the government and their collaborators that a new generation is rising. **Their voices will not be stolen; they will not be silenced.**

### SPEAKERS



Jonathan Rozen  
USA



Nashilongo Gervasius  
NAMIBIA



Noah Ajare  
NIGERIA



Olajumoke  
Alawode-James  
NIGERIA



Rigobert Kenmogne  
CAMEROON



Rinu Oduala  
NIGERIA



Sigi Mwanzia  
KENYA



Zeal Akaraiwe  
NIGERIA