

Interview with

### Zigwai Tagwai

ONE Global Activist and Rotary  
Positive Peace Activator

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*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon*

*Interview series in collaboration with the  
Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate  
of the African Union Commission*



#### **IICBA: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?**

My name is Zigwai Tagwai. I am an activist who has worked to promote active citizenship in governance processes in Nigeria, engaging with stakeholders in the public, private, civic sector, and elected representatives. The aim has been to demand accountability and transparency in governance and social service delivery. I am a graduate of International Studies from Ahmadu Bello University and a pioneer alumna of the School of Politics Policy and Governance (SPPG), with a certificate in Public Leadership and Policy. I am also a Mandela Washington Fellow and an alumna of the Young African Leaders Initiative Regional Leadership Centre (YALI RLC), with a certificate of Leadership in Civic Engagement, and experience in project management and implementation. I am a Rotary Positive Peace Activator committed to driving peace building efforts at local, community, and global levels, working in partnership with Rotarians and the Institute for Economics & Peace. Finally, I am a ONE Global Activist with ONE Campaign in Nigeria supporting efforts to end extreme poverty and preventable diseases.

#### **IICBA: You have worked with several NGOs in Nigeria. Could you tell us what you have learned from some of these experiences?**

My experience working with non-governmental organizations in Nigeria has focused on issues of women's empowerment as well as civic education and citizens' engagement in politics and governance.

**Background:** This series of interviews was prepared for Africa Youth Day celebrated on November 1 each year. Youth are defined by the African Union as the population from 15 to 35 years of age. The African Union Commission through the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYP) is commemorating African Youth Day 2023 through month-long activities under the theme "1 Million Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movement that Transcends Borders." The theme is a call to all youth development stakeholders, member states, and partners to mobilize, implement and support the 1 Million Next Level Initiative through creating and accelerating opportunities for youth in the 4Es +H (Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Engagement + Health and wellbeing). The youth featured in this series of interviews are exemplary in their work in service to others in the areas covered by 4Es+H.



I have had the opportunity to work among others with Aspilos Foundation, the Young African Leaders Initiative, the Accountability Lab Nigeria, Women in Management Business and Public Service, the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, and other organizations. I have come to appreciate the value of collaboration and partnerships in promoting causes and ensuring that transformational and sustainable impact is made, especially in the civic space where a lot of organizations are working on either similar or intertwining social or human rights issues. This has further cemented in my mind the words of Martin Luther King Jr. who said: *“there is power in numbers and there is power in unity.”*

I have also learnt the power of consistency and resilience in fighting for the causes I believe in and ensuring that the rights of every human are upheld and safeguarded. It may not always seem like the efforts we put in are making a difference, but I always remember that *“little drops of water make an ocean”*, and as Andrew Young puts it, *“We think it is complicated to change the world. Change comes*

*little by little. Nothing worthwhile can happen in one generation”*. Inclusion, consultation of all stakeholders at every point of engagement on an issue, planning, or implementation is essential to ensure that the right problems are being addressed using the most effective solutions. The place of feedback and efficient information sharing is key to any initiative, community, relationship or project. And we never should stop learning.

***ICBA: What are some of the initiatives that you are currently involved with?***

I am currently one of 41 Nigerian youths selected from a large pool of applicants to participate in the 10-weeks full-time Legislative Internship Programme implemented by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) with support from the European Union (EU) for young Nigerians who wish to gain knowledge of legislative practices and processes at the National Assembly (Nigerian parliament). I have been assigned to the House of Representatives Committee on Civil Society Organizations and Development Partners, where I get to observe plenary sessions, attend public hearings, learn the lawmaking process and how a bill is passed into law. This is helping me build my understanding of the functions and operations of the Nigerian Legislature, familiarize myself with legislative documents, and gain knowledge of the foundation and framework of legislative processes. I am providing administrative assistance to my committee clerk, analyzing legislative documents, writing reports on proceedings during the plenary session and some speeches, and relating with civil society organizations during meetings or trainings.

I am also working on a community development project that has to do with capacity building for stakeholders (traditional leaders, clergy, representatives of youth







associations, unions, educational institutions, public officials, and civil society organizations) on peace building strategies and citizens participation in budget formulation and implementation within my local government area, Jema'a, in Kaduna state, Nigeria.

**IICBA: Why did you take those initiatives, what motivated you?**

There is no greater force in any society than a well-informed citizenry, equipped to effectively and consistently engage elected and appointed representatives towards ensuring that they deliver on their responsibility and every citizen can afford, access, and benefit from quality basic services. The role of citizens cannot be overemphasized in the process of policy formulation, budget drafting, and implementation, whether as civil servants, contractors, traditional leaders, youths, persons with disabilities, or legislators. No society can thrive without an awakened citizenry who take ownership of the development of their society, and leaders who are committed to service, consultation, transparency, and accountability.

These are my reasons for taking up the legislative internship and working on the community development initiative for my local government. I intend to not just build capacity and gain practical skills, but also put into practice all that I am learning by engaging the citizens in my community with knowledge of how legislation works and how to effectively engage with representatives. I also intend to serve as a connecting link between community members and the National Assembly, especially the representatives of my community, to amplify their voices, concerns, and needs, so they can be heard and attended to.

**IICBA: What are some of the obstacles that you encounter in your work and how do you overcome them?**

First will be getting buy-in from a good number of community members or target audiences, with genuine interest in and commitment to pursuing the causes that matter and sustaining momentum after the initial engagement. This is because most persons have either lost hope in the ability of the government to effectively address the challenges of its citizens, or do not trust the government of the day to truly have the interest of the people at heart. This itself is a result of consistent broken/false promises. In overcoming these challenges, I hope to ensure that for every idea that I have, I consult people to get their opinion, get practical examples of consequences and benefits of engaging or not in the issues, and together build a realistic plan on how to engage and sustain an initiative.

Second will be the challenge of funding. The work that I do has no government budget appropriation, but it involves a lot of stakeholder engagements through travels, meetings, training sessions, and stakeholder management over a long period of time. This results in costs ranging from securing venues for meetings to providing logistical support to the project team and participants, as well as technical and administrative support, or even consultants or facilitators in some cases, as well as contacts with media. In addressing these challenges, I have learnt to not only build relationships through networking, but also to maintain these relationships by contributing my quota to the work that they do. This has in turn made it easier for me to reach out to my network and leverage expertise for the work that I do.

## ***IICBA: What could authorities and various organizations do to improve opportunities for youth in Nigeria?***

Authorities and organizations should be more responsive to feedback on how they are carrying out their responsibilities. This can help enhance inclusion in rolling out initiatives and effective communication, thereby ensuring better outcomes. There should also be more platforms created to support and promote youth innovative ideas and initiatives, not just through capacity building, but also with technical and financial support (say by linking youth with partners who can support them with equipment, staff, materials, workspace, etc.) Existing policies and structures should be reviewed to ensure that they are viable enough to support opportunities in a safe environment where youth initiatives and contributions can be nurtured, considered, and utilized. I believe that funding in the form of grants should also be made available not just to individuals who have registered organizations or a company, but also to independent individuals who have a proven track record of good work in whatever area they are committed to, so as to enable them to implement initiatives and project plans which they have nurtured over time but have been unable to efficiently lead because of a lack of resources.

## ***IICBA: Did you benefit from support from Rotary for some of your initiatives, whether through funding or training? How useful was this support?***

I was a beneficiary of the Nigerian Rotary - IEP Peace Ambassador Program between February to May 2022, and of the Rotary Positive Peace Activator training for West and Central African peacebuilders between March to April 2023. Both trainings helped in improving my knowledge of strategies and tools for building and sustaining peace. They strengthened my ability to identify concrete ways to enhance and engage in peace and conflict resolution



and leverage the pillars of Positive Peace. I was also able to build a valuable network of like-minded individuals from across West and Central Africa. I have been able to apply these strategies in my work in Nigeria.

## ***IICBA: What advice do you have for other youth in Nigeria, and more generally in Africa?***

You are not alone, your ideas are valid, and no one will place more value on the cause that matters to you than you do. You need to keep at it, push the boundaries, and never let anyone take your voice from you. Find others who are also doing the work or willing to commit. It is a world of collaboration and not competition. We must win together and leave no one behind. Be intentional about every step you take and decision you make, never stop learning, and be ready to speak up for yourself and others.

## ***IICBA: Looking back, is there something you would do differently?***

If I had known all that I do now know, I would have started on this part of community service, advocacy, and civil rights activism much younger. I would have exposed myself to more cross-cultural and inter racial experiences at a younger age. I would have taken even more risks by getting out of my comfort zone. However, I also believe that everything in life happens for a reason. All our individual experiences sum up to make the whole story in the end. So just maybe, I would not have made it to this side of the divide if I had done anything differently.

## ***IICBA: Finally, could you please share a personal anecdote about yourself?***

I remember the day I received the news of my acceptance into my choice of a competitive secondary school while I was taking care of chores at home. I ran to share the news with my dad, and like the flash of lightening, he had me on his back and ran all around the compound with such a beautiful resounding laughter I can never forget. That day, I understood that though a burden/fight/cause may seem like yours alone, the victory could be for a thousand more.

### **Disclaimer & Acknowledgment**

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