Centre for Inclusive Social Development

Webinar Recap

NIGERIA'S PUBLIC DEBT

Strengthening Oversight, Disclosure and Accountability



Webinar Recap

Centre for Inclusive Social Development

We have the debt rules.
We don't have the enforcement.

At a webinar organised by the Centre for Inclusive Social Development (CISD) in partnership with Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja, three experts examined how Nigeria borrows, who reports on the money, and how citizens can hold the system to account.



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ARE WE BORROWING RIGHT?

Before any loan is approved, the National Assembly must scrutinise the request. Isaac Botti set out what that should look like:

1. Loans tied to specific capital projects, not vague budget lines
2. Borrowing aligned with national development priorities
3. A clear justification for why a deficit is necessary at that time
4. A cost-benefit analysis of the loan's long-term impact

In practice, Isaac said, government presents blanket borrowing figures with no clear project links, so no one can tell if a loan was necessary or affordable.

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THEN CAME THE BIG QUESTION

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?



Isaac Botti described a borrowing system that is hard to follow, and harder to check.

Blanket figures

Borrowing requests with no clear link to specific projects

Recurrent spending

Loans paying for salaries and debt service, against the Fiscal Responsibility Act

No tracking

No way to tell if a loan was necessary or affordable

Put simply: imagine borrowing money to build a school, then spending it on groceries.

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WHO'S WATCHING THE MONEY?

Chinedu Bassey explained that once a loan is approved, reporting is split across five institutions, and none of them holds the full picture.

1. **Debt Management Office (DMO)**, the primary debt tracker
2. **Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)**, monetary and financial data
3. **Ministry of Finance**, budget and expenditure
4. **Fiscal Responsibility Commission (FRC)**, the fiscal watchdog
5. **Auditor General of the Federation**, audit and verification

Chinedu noted there is no single, centralised law governing debt reporting. Each institution works in its own silo, leaving gaps where accountability should be.

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REPORTS WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES

Chinedu then turned to what Parliament should be receiving, so it can oversee the debt profile and act in time.

An ideal reporting framework would include:

1. Debt sustainability analysis reports
2. Risk management reports
3. Debt service management reports
4. Quarterly fiscal allocation and budget performance reports

Chinedu pointed out that the DMO must submit its annual debt report to the National Assembly by June of the following year, but nothing happens when that deadline is missed.

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THE ACCOUNTABILITY CHAIN

Tobechukwu Ezeuko traced the six steps every loan should pass through, from approval to public benefit, and where each one breaks today.

STEP		WHERE IT BREAKS TODAY
1	Project approval	*Often vague; projects not well defined*
2	Disbursement	*Tracking of released funds is weak*
3	Expenditure	*Procurement irregularities are common*
4	Implementation	*Many projects stall or are abandoned*
5	Verification	*Independent checks are rare*
6	Public benefit	*Often not realised, or never measured*

Tobechukwu said that when a project stalls, the public deserves a published assessment of why, and what is being done to fix it.

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A WATCHDOG WITHOUT TEETH

All three speakers kept returning to one structural weakness: the Fiscal Responsibility Commission (FRC).

WHAT THE FRC CAN DO

- ✓ Observe
- ✓ Report

WHAT IT CANNOT DO

- × Sanction
- × Prosecute
- × Compel compliance

Why it matters: without enforcement power, the FRC is essentially advisory. Institutions can ignore fiscal rules without facing meaningful consequences.

The panel's fix: amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act to give the FRC power to sanction and prosecute violations.

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IT'S BORROWED IN YOUR NAME



The National Assembly approves every loan on citizens' behalf. Yet most Nigerians don't know what is being borrowed, or why.

How citizens can engage:

Hold your representatives accountable for every loan they approve

Engage legislators in your constituency: town halls, petitions, direct contact

Demand clear, public explanations of every loan approval

Use CISD's upcoming debt tracker to see what loans exist and what they fund

Chinedu reminded participants that citizens take part in governance through their representatives, and those representatives must answer to them.

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SO, WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Four reform signals emerged from the discussion:

1 **Give the FRC teeth**

Amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act so the Commission can sanction and prosecute violations.

2 **Tie every loan to a project**

Link borrowing to specific capital projects, backed by a cost-benefit analysis.

3 **Report on time, with consequences**

Regular, quarterly debt reporting to the National Assembly, enforced when deadlines are missed.

4 **Open grievance channels**

Phone, WhatsApp and online reporting for debt-funded projects, with reference numbers, escalation and published complaint data.

These aren't just technical fixes. They are what make public borrowing visible, traceable and accountable.

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WHO SHAPED THIS CONVERSATION

Moderator & Panelists



Moderator

Ayomide Ladipo

Communication and Advocacy, Centre for Communication and Social Impact



Panelist

Mr. Chinedu Bassey

Advocacy and Political Engagement Consultant, GI-ESCR



Panelist

Mr. Isaac Botti

Programmes Coordinator, Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action)



Panelist

Mr. Tobechukwu Ezeuko

Policy and Data Analyst, CISD

Compiled by the Research Department, Centre for Inclusive Social Development (CISD).

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WHAT THE WEBINAR LEFT US WITH

Nigeria has the rules. What it lacks is enforcement.

Every loan is approved in citizens' names. The real test is whether Nigerians can see what was borrowed, track what it built, and hold their representatives to account.

Coming soon from CISD: a public debt tracker showing what Nigeria owes, what it funds, and what you can do.

