

Ivory-NG



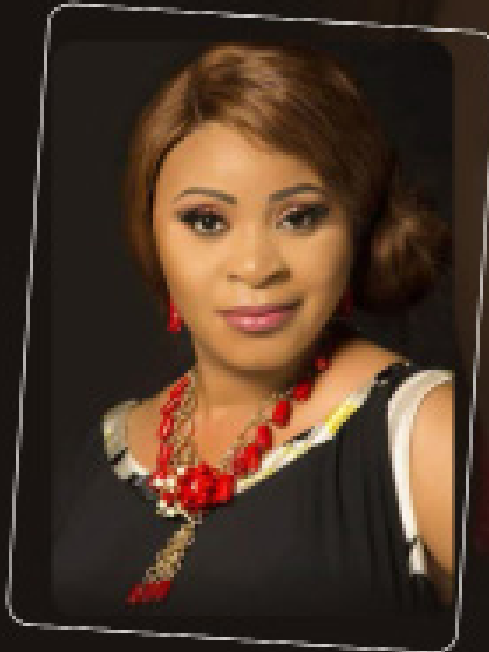
A Lifestyle...Expanding Possibilities

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER '19

John Audu

**The Consummate
Engineer**

Editor's note



The year 2019 has a roller coaster ride but I remain thankful for God's unending blessings. From IvoryNG.com and by extension, the downloadable magazine, we say thank you for your faith in us. And what perfect way to round up the year than with our final edition for the year which features the amiable Engr. John Audu who recently got elected as the Chairman of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Victoria Island branch.

A distinguished professional with a proven track record in both the private and public sector, Engr Audu who is the manager for gas facilities engineering and major capital project relations, in the NNPC/DPR division for Chevron not only reveals in this interview, some of the tactics he hopes to deploy to transform the branch into an enviable one and by extension, make a lasting impact on the professional lives of registered members of the branch, but also, a few of the things that had defined who he is today.

A fellow of the NSE, Engr Audu's journey to becoming one of the most sought-after engineers in this clime, began when he enrolled to read civil engineering at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Shortly after his youth service in 1989, he joined the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, Benin where he worked for four years. He moved around a bit thereafter, working with several oil servicing companies in Warri and finally got a job with Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria in 1998 as an estate services engineer (contract staff). In 2001, he left Shell for Chevron as a (contract staff) construction and planning engineer. In 2005, he returned to Shell as a full staff, left again in 2008 and returned to Chevron where he has remained ever since for 11 years. I promise that it will be an interesting and captivating read.

Enjoy.

Nkarenyi Ukonu

Can you break down in simple terms what your job entails at Chevron?

I am the manager for gas, facilities engineering and major capital projects relations, in the NNPC/DPR division at Chevron. We have a facilities engineering and major capital projects division - one of the most prominent divisions in Chevron. Then we also have a division responsible for liaising with government agencies - the NNPC/DPR Relations Division. I was seconded from the facilities and major capital project division to the NNPC/DPR Relations Division. And this I have been doing for the 2 years now.

Is there a particular reason why you have crisscrossed quite a number of oil and gas companies before settling down in Chevron?

I was looking for better opportunities. But I returned finally and chose to remain with Chevron because I love the company. It is a great place to work, an excellent organization that gives you the opportunity to excel. There are lots of opportunities to excel within Chevron. Like they say at Chevron, your career is in your hands. Sometimes, it may not work out the way you want, but on the whole, it is a very rewarding experience. The company also provides the





opportunity to work in departments where you can best add value, depending on business needs. That would mean that you find fulfillment with what you do. I would rather be doing something else but within the Nigerian context, it is an excellent job. Chevron has given me a very decent life.

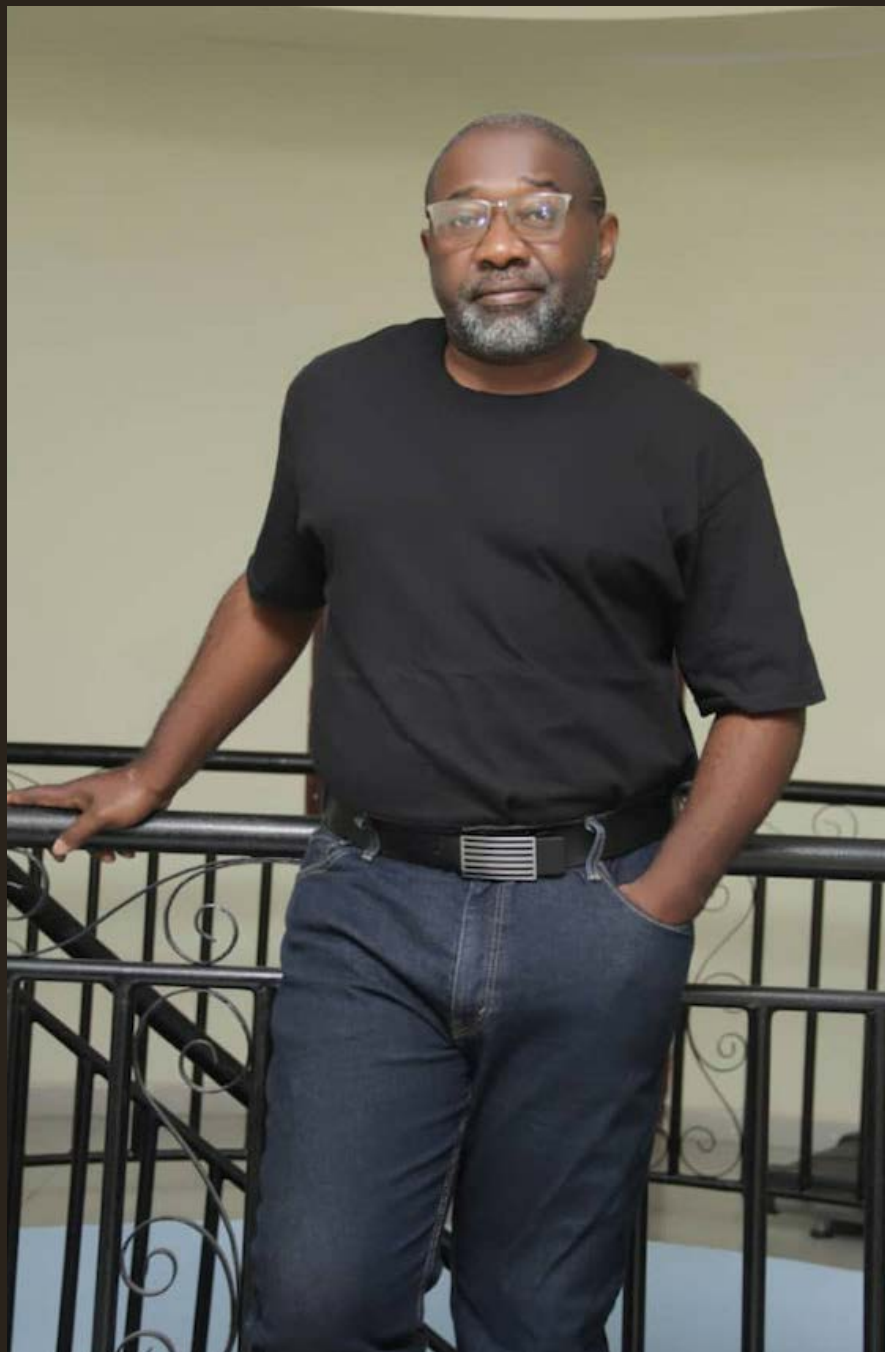
What would you have loved to be doing if you weren't doing what you do now?

Community service. I love to serve my society, not just through the Nigerian Society of Engineers but the society at large. There is a lot of competency gaps in our society. There are many opportunities for improvement in many areas of our national life across board. And some of us have had the good fortune of working for some great organizations, some of which are Fortune 500 companies. Having learnt a few things from these places, I believe that I have something to share with the larger society, in terms of the experiences I have acquired over the years. So, wherever I have lived and worked, I have tried my best, directly or indirectly, to impact the society with my experience. It is obvious to me now that if I wasn't working for Chevron, I would have been doing something along those lines.

I suppose that informed your decision to vie for the chairmanship of a chapter of the Nigerian Society of Engineers
Absolutely. It is a major part of it.

What is the story behind your emerging the chairman of the Nigerian Society of Engineers, Victoria Island chapter?

Many people within the ranks of the NSE felt that they needed my kind of experience, exposure, my ideas, capabilities, to be at the helm of affairs. I was encouraged to vie for the position. This isn't the first time I was encouraged to vie for the position but I didn't accept the challenge because of my work pressure. But recently, I accepted the challenge because I had the backing of some very senior managers at Chevron who are familiar with what we do at the NSE. The general manager, facilities engineering and major capital projects,



Engineer Andrew Omomehin, was largely instrumental to my becoming chairman. He pushed me and told me to go for it. I hope to give it my best shot.

Besides the support of your very senior managers, didn't you think you could vie for the position on your own?

Probably not now. I was looking at some time in the future but I knew that I would always contribute my quota to the success of the body regardless.

Now that you are chairman, what is your manifesto?

My mission will be based on two imperatives: first, continuity - where my team and I will work towards sustaining the good work done by my predecessor, consolidate and build on the gains of the outgoing leadership. And the second, to proffer engineering

solutions to fundamental societal problems. Perhaps I may have been preparing for the job for a while now, because I have always had a passion for service like I said, and I have been in and out of the EXCO for the past 10 years, contributing positively every year. As soon as I became chairman and even on the election day when we were asked to speak, it was clear what I wanted to get done. The immediate past chairman built an enduring legacy for the branch; she put us on a very good pedestal from which we can spring even higher. So the logical thing to do would be to continue from where she stopped, or at the least, do exactly what she did, but, with her assistance, we are going to try to bring in some new ideas. It's extremely important to me that the branch be vision-driven and focused. And so, one of our first task was to align behind shared vision: "the engineering hub for homegrown technology and industrialization".

To actualize this vision, we have come up with 4 strategic initiatives. Pervasively Innovate: I strongly believe that the way forward in this country is for engineers to innovate pervasively, come up with home grown solutions, otherwise we will continuously be dependent on foreign technical help which isn't sustainable. Engineers in Nigeria must become much more innovative than we are presently. There are a number of them quite alright, but they aren't enough. We need to churn out innovations en masse. We hope to come up with programs that will engender innovations.

Service to Society (SoS): Again, as engineers, I desire for us to serve our society. If there is an engineering problem somewhere, I want people to know there is a place they can report that problem, a help desk, if you like. Not all of these problems will be engineering problems but we will prioritize them, segregate the ones we can deal with and channel them to the right people. We will proactively look at issues in the society and proffer engineering solutions to them and through advocacy campaigns to the government, we will try to focus their attention on resolving them.

Enhanced Welfare: I also want to create enhanced welfare packages for our members. The younger ones are getting disillusioned because they want to be able to say that they

belong to a society that really are about their wellbeing. This is very ambitious but I am going to try to achieve it. We have an annual job fair in our branch which my predecessor started, where we invite major companies to recruit engineers. I love it and will continue with it.

Human Capital Development: This is our fourth strategic initiative. There is a dire need to continue to improve the capacity of our engineers in many areas. When I take an engineer from a typical International Oil Company (IOC) here in Nigeria and compare him with an engineer in the public sector in Nigeria, there is a huge difference. The engineer in the IOC may not necessarily be more intelligent than the one in the public sector, but his exposure is many times more than that of the one in the public sector. Not only in exposure, but also the ethics they work with. They are both very different. We don't want that. In fact, for the public service to be more productive, the public sector should actually have engineers of higher capacity and more exposure than the engineers in IOCs. We have already started to develop a suite of programmes, including workshops/seminars as part of our effort to bridge this gap. There are all kinds of things that I am passionate about that we will do. I don't want to preempt the effort, but I have an excellent team working on these plans. Your tenure is only two years.

Do you think you will be able to achieve all of these within that time space?

I will try to but even if I don't, I am hoping my successor will continue from where I stopped. I am also trying to create a situation whereby whoever comes in as chair-man after this tenure will have a structure that will have the branch running on auto pilot.

What would you want your goal to be by the time your tenure nears its end?

To be among the top three well run branches. We used to be at the 16th spot out of over 70 branches. It is not bad but I want to build our capacity such that we will be among the top three. Again, across the country, there is a huge awareness among engineers to become better at what we do. I am sure the competition is even stiffer now. I would love to see that as a goal. I would also love to see us developing the younger engineers and turn them into world class

engineers. I want to be able to point to at least 10 of them that we trained and brought up to that level. In addition, at the end of my tenure, I would like to see the branch transformed into a self-sustaining organization. I don't want to have to appeal to people for money for the basic needs of the branch or to sponsor all programmes. I want to build up our membership base and a structure whereby membership dues and other levies will be enough to



run the branch. I want us to be a force to reckon with, within the government. I want them to know that they can depend on us for solutions to fundamental issues in the society. Finally, I want

us to be able to win the respect of the public within our catchment area, to let the public know that the NSE is here for them and is contributing to their wellbeing. Those are our



goals and I am all set for it.

Are your eyes set on becoming the NSE president one day?

Not really but let's wait and see. I am not that ambitious; I like to take things one step at a time. My goal is to see if the playing field makes it possible for me to contribute significantly even at this level. I will be contented with that because for me, it is the selfless contributions that matter. I am 52, so there is a limit to how far I can push.

What if you get the backing of major players just as you did for the chairmanship, won't you consider it?

I probably will but it depends on a lot of things; on if the system will willing to accept change, how much effort I would need to put in to effect the change etc. It can be quite frustrating sometimes when you don't have the kind of people who are willing to effect positive change. I empathize with a lot of people in Nigeria who are in positions of leadership because I know how difficult it can be.

What would you say must have significantly shaped you into who you are today?

The death of my father who was a very strict civil servant. He was a good man. My mum who is the first cousin to the famous Bongos Ikwue was just 32 years old when he died. She has been a widow since then. I was just 18 when he died and being the first with six siblings, I had to grow up fast. As a young man, I had to grow up fast. As a young man, I wasn't very hardworking and didn't have much of a focus but after my dad died, everything changed. I have not stopped being serious. I wish I had been more serious from the beginning of my life.

Any regrets about life?

Not knowing what I know today in terms of hardwork, dedication and focus. Growing up in the North back then did not encourage competition. There were many laid back young people around me. It was difficult for me to understand why those from the east, south and west had to work so-hard in school! I didn't quite understand it. It was when I got posted to Warri while working with the Federal Ministry of Works that it became clear to me. I saw those hardworking people working for the big companies. While in the north, I didn't know

about Chevron or Shell, but they did! When I found out what they were earning and the quality of life they were living and what they could do for their family, I became a transformed man. Fortunately, I was still a young man. It wasn't too late at age 25. I went back to school and made myself very visible and marketable. Wherever I have worked, I absorbed everything like a sponge and I have never stopped going to school, and that has kept me on top of my game. On the flipside, I really have no regrets because life could have turned out worse. So many others have turned out worse than I did.

What is your greatest accomplishment in life so far?

My three children. The last one, Oluchi is simply a genius. She is 19 and is graduating early next year with a GPA of 4.0, by the grace of God. She is reading Psychology in Canada. The first, a girl, Onyeche who went to Canada to do a Masters Degree did so well that she was employed out of school. She works for Morgan Stanley, Montreal, Canada. Then my son Adakole made a first class in Computer Science from the University of Buckingham, Uk. I have a lot to be thankful for.

Besides your work with NSE, how else do you give back to society?

I come from a poor place in Benue State so I try to uplift the girls in my village. So any of them who is interested in going to school, as many as I can afford, I take up the responsibility of their education; from primary school up to university level. Most of them are relatives by the way as I come from a very large family.

Why women?

They are more vulnerable in our society, and as it turns out, generally smarter.