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## JOHN CHIGBU

Our plan to  
revolutionise  
West Africa's  
healthcare  
underway in  
Nigeria and  
Ghana



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# JOHN CHIGBU

*Our plan to revolutionise West Africa's healthcare  
underway in Nigeria and Ghana*



*A group photograph of some participants at the official launch event of Cassona Global Imaging Ltd. Nigeria, in Abuja, on 15 May 2025*

In this interview in the Eminent Business Personalities Series of Financial Nigeria, John Chigbu, CEO/Chairman of the Board of Cassona Global Imaging Ltd., speaks on his plans to revolutionise West Africa's healthcare. He was interviewed by Jide Akintunde, Managing Editor, Financial Nigeria publications.

**Jide Akintunde (JA):** Congratulations on

the recent launch of your operations in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. What value does your company want to deliver in Nigeria?

**John Chigbu (JC):** Thank you very much Jide, for enabling me to share my thoughts with Financial Nigeria about our mission in Nigeria and the value Cassona Global Imaging Ltd. Nigeria (Cassona) would like

to bring to our country, Nigeria, and the sub-Saharan African region generally. The three core values Cassona brings to the healthcare sector of Nigeria are sustainability, integrity, and responsibility.

The sustainability we are emphasising is two-pronged. The first is financial sustainability. This means that we want the healthcare sector (hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres), public and private,

to get a fair return on their investment in equipment, new projects, and human capital that would spur or encourage more investment in the sector. In the case of the public sector, such return ought to cover their expenses and encourage the government to invest further in the public healthcare sector. This is important because if we can bring financial sustainability, I predict the healthcare sector, as a critical infrastructure, would be able to attract more investments, including into other industries.

As a financial and corporate international lawyer, I know, firsthand, that investors generally look for certain infrastructures as a pre-requisite to investment. The most important to them is healthcare. Accordingly, I believe one of the values Cassona can bring to Nigeria is ability to attract foreign investment (including medical tourism) into Nigeria. We want to encourage healthcare institutions in Nigeria to adopt business practices aimed at making healthcare attractive to investors who wish to do business in the country.

The second prong is sustainable development of the industry. This means we are encouraging healthcare institutions in Nigeria, both private and public, to adopt business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the business and the goals of its stakeholders today, while enhancing the human resources that will be needed in the future. One of the main issues of the healthcare sector in Nigeria, or I should say the whole of Africa, is brain drain. We are watching our doctors, nurses, and other healthcare practitioners leave the country every day because there is not a clear future here for them. Cassona would like to invest in developing the healthcare sector sustainably, not only by investing in equipment and construction of hospitals, but also by investing in growing human capital, creating more jobs and training opportunities for the healthcare practitioners within the country. We ought to be attracting West African students who are educated

overseas, bring them home to make contributions to the healthcare industry. I want to see the end of the era of depending on expatriates to fix our equipment and of medical tourism overseas.

As our second value, we want to deliver integrity in responding to the needs of patients. We believe that a patient who needs to go to a hospital for treatment should be responded to without delay and treated with dignity. Integrity – coupled with responsiveness – would build trust in the healthcare system.

### One of the values Cassona can bring to Nigeria is ability to attract foreign investment, including medical tourism into Nigeria.

As already noted, our third core value is responsibility. As a provider of tools, such as medical diagnostic imaging equipment, Cassona has the responsibility to provide equipment that would work all the time, rather than “now and then”. Our focus has been and would always be to deliver equipment that work; equipment that are suited to the needs of a healthcare practitioner, rather than aimed solely at making a profit. I hate to say this, but many equipment suppliers to our country, to date, are pure profiteers.

Cassona has over 30 employees locally; they are from all over the world: United States, Mexico, St. Lucia, China, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Nigeria. One thing they all have in common is that they are all accomplished professionals in their field and willing to deliver their service with a smile.

I can tell you that over 35% of our customers since we officially entered the healthcare market in Ghana are repeat customers. Over 65% of our new customers are referrals from previous customers.

I have met many customers that told me they have had bad experience in acquiring equipment from foreign equipment providers. Our goal is to change this narrative.

Finally, we also have “responsibility” to ensure that our community benefit from any largesse that come from our activity. My wife and I take corporate responsibility seriously. For medical schools, we offer free hands-on clinical training workshops for their students on a regular basis. The era of theoretical medical training or training with obsolete equipment should be gone. Our own diagnostic centres and training centres would allocate special days of the week for students to visit and get firsthand experience with modern diagnostic imaging equipment. To encourage early Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) education, we have donated complete science laboratory equipment to secondary schools in Accra, Ghana. We intend to do the same in Nigeria and encourage others to join this effort. This practice, I believe, ensures that the next generation of Nigerians (and sub-Saharan Africans, generally) would not fall behind in the STEM education. My wife and I have committed to donating over 100 science labs to middle schools among the ECOWAS countries in the next 5 years.

**JA:** Prior to that launch in May this year, Cassona Global Imaging Limited has had some transactional activities in Nigeria. Would you like to describe the range of operational and investment activities that your company plans to engage in in Nigeria?

**JC:** Indeed, we have already installed a CT Scanner in Abuja and sold a Digital X-Ray to a buyer in Kano (not yet installed) prior to our launch in May.

I would like to break the range of operational investment we plan for Nigeria into three categories. The first is Public Private Partnership (PPP). Partnership with government hospitals to invest and operate



CT Scanner installed in Abuja by Cassona

modern diagnostic imaging centres within the hospitals is a goal we aspire to. As a Nigerian (though schooled abroad), I understand funding is an issue for our country because of the sheer number of our population. I believe if our governments (State and Federal) can outsource the diagnostic imaging centres within existing hospitals to Cassona, I am confident the sustainability, integrity, and responsibility values I discussed above would be realised.

The second is joint venture with private providers. Partnering with the private sector healthcare-providers to open private diagnostic centres, structured as a joint venture, is another investment activity we want to pursue in Nigeria. As the exclusive distributor for world renowned OEMs (Neusoft Medical Systems and Mindray), supported by Sinosure (China's ex-

port import bank), we come equipped to make a difference in the Nigerian private healthcare space. Nigerian (and Ghanaian) financial institutions have also expressed interest in working with us to invest in healthcare. Since our entry into the West African healthcare market (starting with Ghana) I have seen a surge in private healthcare companies who are opening diagnostic centres in Nigeria. It is a good sign for the healthcare industry.

To inject more confidence into the industry, we are ready to participate in providing capital access by being an equity partner in diagnostic centres since we have access to the equipment such diagnostic centres require. In cases where it is not economically feasible to install the full array of imaging equipment, joint venture with Cassona could help alleviate the problem. We can provide investment

for a centre that includes lab, ultrasound, Digital X-ray, and advanced imaging equipment like CT Scanners and MRIs. Private operators that partner with Cassona will be able to receive the full line of diagnostic imaging equipment because instead of assuming the full cost of the equipment, Cassona will waive a portion in exchange for equity interest. Cassona would also help these private operators with best-practices management using qualified professionals, including trainee diagnosticians to help run the diagnostic centre.

The third category of our investment is sale and distribution of equipment to buyers, partnering with financial institutions like Zenith Bank and Ecobank. We are encouraging more banks to join us by giving loans to responsible healthcare providers to purchase equipment from

Cassona. As support, Cassona is willing to charge a low interest rate for the borrower/customer, with bank guarantees.

**JA:** For those who are not familiar with Cassona Global Imaging and are concerned about its pedigree in delivering products and services, how would you like to introduce the US company and your partnership with it?

**JC:** When my wife and I came back to West Africa, we were viewed with suspicion due to distrust created by previous suppliers of diagnostic imaging equipment. This endemic distrust has mostly gone away because my wife and I live among the locals, our young daughter goes to school in Accra, Ghana (where we reside most of the time).

Here is a summarised history of Cassona, with more details on its website – [www.cassonainternational.com](http://www.cassonainternational.com). I am the founder of Cassona USA Inc. (doing business as Cassona International), which started business in 2013. I originally started Cassona International as an adjunct to my Law Practice, Chigbu & Co, LLP, to provide consulting services to Sovereign borrowers for green-energy projects. This was during the US Administration of President Barack Obama. I wanted to separate my work in project financing from my law firm. This is primarily because the rules of the American Bar Association as well as California Bar Association (under which I hold my license to practice law) forbids certain practices, such as sharing legal fees with non-lawyers, which I must do in projects financing. In the consulting role, Cassona International helped fund many projects (funded by the US Exim Bank and other export credit agencies) in Africa, Central Asia, and South America.

Fast forward to 2020, project financing dried up and my wife, a native of China (also an international tax lawyer) suggested we begin the import and supply of personal protection equipment (PPE) to help combat the Covid 19 pandemic. We did and sold PPE to several state govern-

ments in the US as well as to hospitals and foundations dedicated to healthcare. This was our first entry into health-care-related activities.

It was during this period (2020 through 2021) that my mother passed away here in Nigeria. Upon further inquiry to the cause of her passing, I determined that lack of diagnostic tools for diagnosis of her illness was a proximate cause of her death. My wife, who had not met my mother and was looking forward to meeting her, was as much in grief as I was. She suggested that we go back to Africa and do our part to make these health tools available.

In August 2022, we entered Ghana on the advice of the US Commercial Service who believed that a less complex market, with relatively friendly culture, was a better place to start a pilot programme in sophisticated equipment distribution. In early 2023, we decided to relocate to Africa and practice law in the US remotely, since our practice was international anyway.

To answer your question more directly, Cassona Global Imaging Ltd Nigeria is a subsidiary and an offshoot of Cassona USA Inc. When we registered our company in Nigeria last year, we faced the same distrust we faced in Ghana due to our affiliation to the US Company. This was the reason we made a placement of a 32 Slice CT Scanner in Abuja prior to our official launch instead of selling it. It is better for purposes of our credibility for our customers to see our equipment in operation in Nigeria prior to committing to buy. It is an expensive marketing strategy, but, as they say, the “taste of the pudding is in the eating.” The testament to the sophistication of our CT Scanner equipment – its modern features, durability, the prowess of our engineers, and our Application Specialist’s ability to train operators of sophisticated modern diagnostic imaging equipment – is available for all to see in Abuja. It would soon be available in Kano for Digital X-Ray machines as well.

**JA:** Quite interestingly, your first operational launch was in Ghana, in 2022. How well is that experience and what values are already being delivered by Cassona in the Ghanaian market?

**JC:** I would say we have had great success in Ghana in the past three years. When we decided to begin distribution of diagnostic imaging equipment in Africa, the U.S. Commercial Services initially recommended East Africa and South Africa as they believed these countries were more business friendly. As a Nigerian and a citizen of the ECOWAS community, I had little doubt of the potential of the region. After further discussion and my disclosure that my mother was born in Ghana and that I am Nigerian, the Commercial Service revised its recommendation and suggested Ghana. Their reasoning, which I agree with, is that Nigeria is a large and complex market to start a new business such as healthcare. Accordingly, Ghana became our first choice of a place to begin as a pilot destination. We are grateful for their recommendation because Ghana is truly a friendly environment for a new business. I believe we have delivered on the three core values I enumerated above in Ghana.

To date, we have installed over 100 diagnostic imaging equipment ranging from ultrasound, X-ray to CT Scanners and our first MRI would be installed by the end of 2025. We have employed over 20 Ghanaians, thus benefiting their economy. We have offered positions to recent graduates of bioengineering (4 so far) as trainee engineers, allowing them to serve their national youth service with us on our payroll. We have built our own proprietary Diagnostic Centre slated to begin operation in August (2025) that would have the complete suite of medical diagnostic imaging equipment, a training centre, and an engineering department.

**JA:** You have considerable experience in mobilising financing for investments in Africa. This may have enabled your plan



Participants at the Cassona Global Imaging Neusoft workshop in Abuja, Nigeria

to offer financing solutions for the acquisition of medical equipment from your company. Would you like to provide some details about the financing solutions for your prospective customers?

**JC:** As a seasoned finance and corporate international tax lawyer, with vast project finance and management experience (over 30 years and counting), I consider myself truly capable of tackling issues related to finance and project management in Nigeria. The difference between Nigeria and more than 35 countries where I have practiced law or financed projects is the absence of credit-worthiness culture. However, it cannot be that different from other emerging nations, such as Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Angola, Congo, Senegal, Venezuela and Malaysia (to name a few) where I have funded projects in oil and

gas, coal-fired generating plants, and renewable energy projects.

The project my wife and I are funding pales in size to my past projects but what makes it interesting is that it is more personal.

Our goal from the very beginning was to provide capital access to our customers in the form of credit facilities. We have continued to do so, even in the face of slow-pay in some cases. Interestingly, however, we have not had many defaults. We have learned a lot in the three years of our sojourn in Ghana. We would face fresh challenges in Nigeria, but we would weather them because we have more support than when we arrived in these shores.

We would replicate our financing structure in Ghana and Nigeria. We have support from organisations like Sinosure

and MEHECO – another Chinese finance company. We are currently in talks with Zenith Bank, Ecobank and LECON Finance Company Limited (a subsidiary of Bank of Industry) to join us in providing capital access to Nigerians. We are hopeful they would, but either way, we would not change our goal of providing capital access, through credit facilities, to Nigerians on an issue as important as health-care.

Our goal is to open the door for more people to invest into the space, not to monopolize the market. Monopoly would defeat the purpose of our relocation from a relative life of ease to pursue what most considered an impossible task. The West African region has the largest population in Africa. Nigeria is ranked 6th in the world in population size. Besides crude oil and natural gas, it has coal, various

minerals (like iron ore, tin, zinc, lead, uranium, aluminum copper, gold and diamond). By all standards, it is blessed with riches. My goal is to encourage other affluent Nigerians to invest at home (especially in healthcare) as I am doing, and as people of conscience like Aliko Dangote, has done. I have never been prouder to be Nigerian than when I watched him speak at the US Exim Bank Annual Conference in Washington DC many years ago; he inspired me. His heart is in the right place, and he is worth emulating.

For us in Cassona, financing solutions is always a case-by-case decision, but our door is always open to responsible healthcare providers. Cassona is ready to be there for everyone that takes healthcare seriously.

**JA:** One of the keys to unlock Africa's development is cross-border, intra-African trade and investment. So, it is very exciting to learn of your investment in Nigeria. How do you think more investments like this (and in various sectors) can be encouraged, including further expansion of Cassona's footprints in Africa?

**JC:** My response to that question is that we need to create conditions to bring our African (including Nigerian) diaspora home. As more diasporas return, more investment, both in money and human capital, would flow back as well. As Africans, we cannot leave our fate in the hands of others.

When I came back in 2022, I initially felt like a foreigner as I have been overseas for 40 plus years. I was able to capture the essence of the West African market because I am a native son. It is like swimming, once you know how to swim, you will never be able to forget. That's what I think my advantage is, and the advantage of all African diaspora. If we can be successful overseas where we are treated as unwanted foreigners, no matter how hard we tried to integrate (with the knowledge we acquired of their culture), we are rejected. We should be able to achieve the

same level of success here as China with the same attitude China has displayed of respecting every country's culture and leaving it alone. I am speaking frankly because, at my age, I have nothing to fear. I have lived a good life, achieved my life's goal in my career and been rewarded handsomely for it. But it is time to call a spade a spade. If Africans model themselves after the West or take our guidance on how to live our lives from them, we will lose our own culture and remain followers.

**African development is overdue. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa and by far the richest, must lead the way. Let Nigerians do it for Nigeria.**

My goal is to expand Cassona's healthcare products and services in Sub-Saharan Africa, one country at a time. Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people but has registered CT Scanners of 205. More than 80% is obsolete (20 to 40 years old) or completely out of commission. Further, the working CT Scanners are only in major cities like Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu or in certain Teaching Hospitals, like ABU. Only about 10% of the working CT Scanners are in the Northern states. By comparison, Australia and New Zealand have a combined population of about 30 million but have over 1,700 operating CT scanners.

**JA:** We are entering a new era in which trade and investment, rather than foreign aid, will likely define the relationship between African countries and other nations of the world. Do you think this will work better for Africa's development than when foreign aid played a more prominent role in the relationship?

**JC:** I believe the world has arrived at the conclusion that Africa is the next place to develop and emerge from poverty, but

we, Africans, must be the architect of that development. Africa has a population of nearly 1.4 billion, just like China and India. We have abundant natural resources and human capital. A little over 62% of Africa is below the age of 25 even with the high mortality rate of children and infants in the continent from health-related diseases. We have the numbers in human resources; we have the natural resources right underneath our feet. In my opinion, all we need is to tap into those two resources to emerge, as China has, from the yoke of poverty and hand-outs. I do not advocate rejecting aid that is sincere. However, aid that is used as a means of keeping Africans compliant and complacent ought to be rejected. There is a saying that if you give a man fish, he might eat for a day. But, if you show him how to fish, he will eat every day. All we have been getting is fish (aid), which makes us unable to fish, hence we Africans are poor. We have many young people ready to learn and ready to work hard. African development is overdue. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa and by far the richest, must lead the way. Let Nigerians do it for Nigeria; we are a proud nation like China; therefore, I believe we have a model to copy. I personally believe we can do it if we can all work together toward the goal of a prosperous future and shared value, instead of allowing ourselves to be divided by malicious instigators.

**JA:** What would you like to see Cassona achieve in Nigeria's healthcare in the next five years?

**JC:** By the grace of God (Allah), I would like to see every Nigerian receive first-class healthcare, irrespective of how rich they are. This would require all hands-on deck: financial institutions (banks and insurance companies), healthcare providers, and all our well-to-do citizens. To put it succinctly, I would like to see Cassona spearhead medical independence for Nigeria.