

15
Years of
STEWARDSHIP



the
TRIUMPHS
AND
TRAVAILS

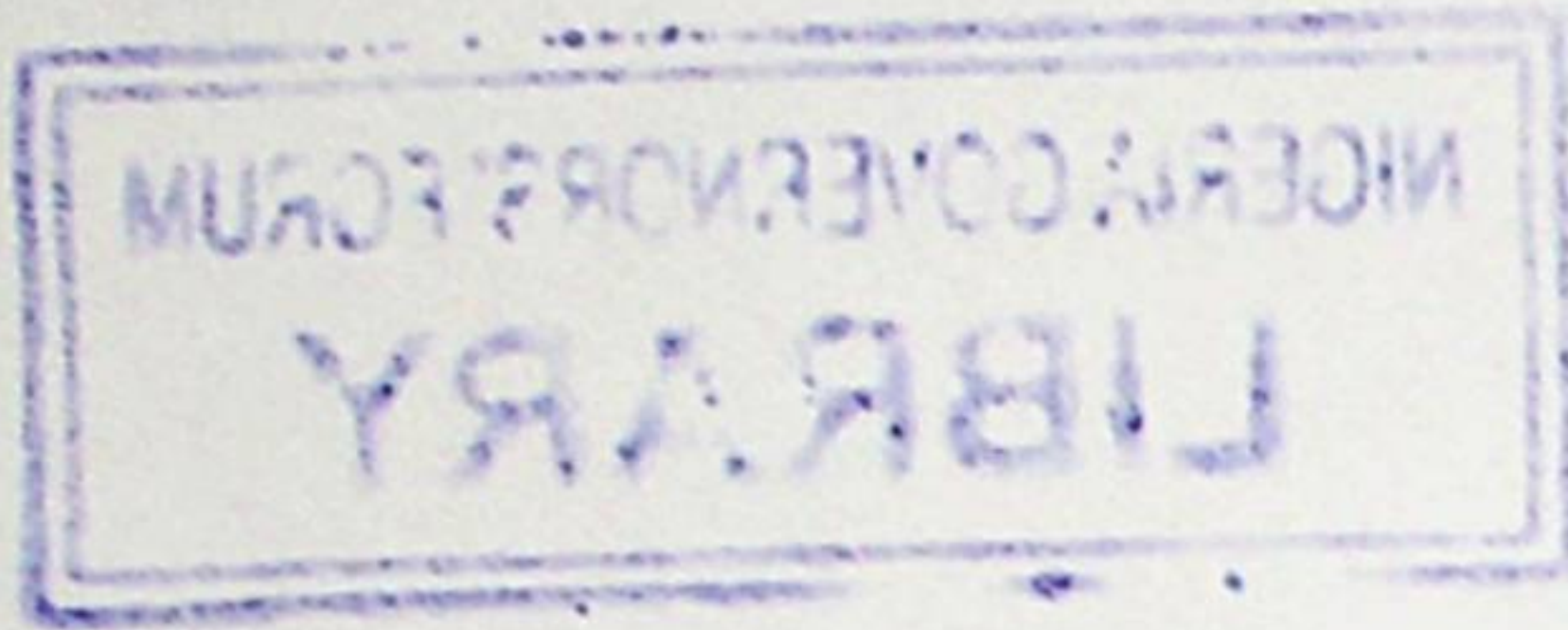
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Years of
STEWARDSHIP



the
TRIUMPHS AND TRAVAILS
REBO USMAN THWAN ICA.



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Contents

Contents	Page
Steward: Definition	iv
Preface	v
Appreciation	vii
CHAPTER ONE. -	
My Early Childhood: The Source Of My Lifestyle And Principle Of My Stewardship	01
CHAPTER TWO -	
My Political Career: How It All Began	06
CHAPTER THREE -	
My Stewardship Under Governor Jolly Tavoro Nyame	11
CHAPTER FOUR -	
My Stewardship Under Governor Danbaba Danfulani Suntai	18
CHAPTER FIVE -	
My Stewardship Under Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku	31
CHAPTER SIX -	
The Travails Of My Stewardship	36
CHAPTER SEVEN -	
Taraba State: My Candid Opinion Of The Way Forward	49
CONCLUSION	54

Steward

**“A person who manages another's
property or financial affairs;
one who administers anything as the
agent of another or others”**

- *DICTIONARY.COM*

Preface



My decision to produce this book will sure come to some people as a surprise. This is because ordinarily, it is no big deal being appointed into a State Government cabinet. This is true because as a cabinet member, one is only a steward and works on the dictates of the State Chief Executive, the Governor. My decision to document a brief on my stewardship is however predicated on the following:

I am privileged to have served under three Executive Governors CONSECUTIVELY, spanning a period of FIFTEEN YEARS. This, by itself is some form of record which to me, deserves some form of documentation. My family had, after my resignation as Chief of Staff, resolved that there was the need for us to organize a THANKSGIVING SERVICE so I thought a worthy souvenir that I could arrange for the people who will be in attendance is the presentation of some form of a recorded information about my stewardship to my principals during those long years.

During my fifteen years of stewardship, I believe my family and I suffered the fiercest forms of undeserved attacks ever recorded in the history of Taraba State by a government appointee. I felt those undeserved accusations should be clarified, now that I have bowed out of public service. This is because some of the accusations that led to those attacks would appear to have got stuck in the minds of the people, and needed to be clarified for the sake of public knowledge, posterity and integrity of my family.

This publication is therefore not an attempt to launder my image in any way, but an honest desire to educate the public on the privileges I enjoyed by working with three state Chief Executives on a roll, and also draw attention to the travails of my stewardship during those years. It is my hope and prayer that as many as will read this publication, especially the upcoming generation of Tarabans, will draw some inspiration from my experiences as captured here. It is also my hope and prayer that as many as had viewed me from afar and accused me on the strength of the misinformation they received concerning me, will have a re-think about me and my family.

Appreciation

This publication has been made possible as a result of the kind decision of **His Excellency, Rev. Jolly T. Nyame** to bring me to political limelight by appointing me special adviser, **His Excellency Late Pharmacist Danbaba Danfulani Suntai** who, after serving together with him in the cabinet of his Excellency Governor Nyame, decided to take me along when God elevated him to the position of governor of Taraba State, and **His Excellency, Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku** who, without anyone lobbying for me, went ahead and appointed me **Chief of Staff** in his administration.

I therefore wish to use this medium to thank them immensely for the privilege they accorded me to serve under them and make the kind of history that I can proudly document in this publication. They have granted me a lifetime privilege that only God can reward them for what they have planted in my life.

My appreciation also goes to all the staff that worked under me and my colleagues in the various cabinets who gave me all

the support I needed to play my roles in the various offices I served in.

I wish to appreciate officials of the **Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter** and the **Muslim Council, Taraba State chapter** who, in one of my trying moments, granted me listening ears and offered to educate their congregations about the true situation of things.

In the course of my stewardship, I had friends and close associates who dedicated themselves to praying for me, especially in my trying moments. I wish to thank them immensely for their labour of love.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to my wife and children who shared in the burden of my travails at certain points of my stewardship.

Above all, I wish to thank the Lord God Almighty who opened the eyes of my principals to identify me for the various positions they appointed me into, and for his divine guidance, favor, and protection all through my period of stewardship.

Chapter One

MY EARLY CHILDHOOD:

THE SOURCE OF MY LIFESTYLE AND PRINCIPLE OF MY STEWARDSHIP

I feel the need to capture in this book, the experience of my childhood and life growing up as a young man born into a very humble family from an obscure community in those days, because it is around this brief story that my entire lifestyle and conduct in public service revolves. It is my sincere hope and prayer that whoever reads this book will understand why I approached my roles in public service the way I did. I also pray that younger generation of people reading this publication will be inspired to attain to higher heights in life, no matter what their backgrounds might be, without having to resort to unacceptable ways of doing things.

I am a native of Kpanten village in Gindin Dutse North District of Donga Local Government Area. I was born to the family of Pa Usman Ehwan on 16th February, 1959 at Nyita, in the same Local Government Area of Taraba State. I started my primary education at the then LEA Primary School, Kufai in the present Kurmi Local Government Area, in January 1967, and later proceeded to then LEA Primary School Nyita in 1969 from where I obtained my First School Leaving Certificate in June 1973. I proceeded to Government College Makurdi in September 1973 and passed out with the WASC Certificate in June 1978. I hold a Higher National Diploma in Accountancy which I obtained at the Kaduna Polytechnic in 1983. I qualified as a Chartered Accountant in November 1990. In July 2002 I was screened and elected Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (FCA). In 2014, I was one out of the four members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) decorated with the highest award of the Institute, **The Gold Medal Award for Contribution to the National Economy and Service to Humanity**. My nomination was on the strength of a citation on my person submitted by members of the Institute from Adamawa and Taraba States.

I had a very rough life growing up. At the age of 13 in 1972, I was faced with the challenge of paying for my entrance examination into secondary school when both my mother and

father were sick, and at the point of death. While my father was poisoned and was between life and death, my mother was down with complications associated with the birth of her ninth child. I had no option but to look for a way of sourcing the Seven Shillings (then the currency in use in Nigeria). I went out working for some teachers on their farms and was able to raise about Three Shillings which was adequate to transport me from my village to the nearby town of Takum to seek for vacation job. I found one and worked in a bakery for one month after which I raised up to Ten Shillings hawking bread. I paid for my entrance examinations with the money I made from the vacation job, passed and was admitted into a government secondary school in 1973.

I have had an extensive working experience in my chosen profession, having trained in the field of professional accounting practice and risen to the position of a **PARTNER** in one of the leading accounting firms in Nigeria, **Onwufuju, Giwa-Osagie & Co (Chartered Accountants)** in 1992. Before then, I had served as **FINANCIAL CONTROLLER** of the defunct Gongola Investment Company Ltd, a position I held upto December 1991 before returning to join the accounting firm where I had earlier trained before qualifying as Chartered Accountant. I was admitted **Partner** there in

January 1992. In October 1993, I floated my own Accounting Firm under the name of **REBO USMAN & CO (CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS)** and have since then been rendering professional services in the fields of auditing, accounting, as well as capacity building in the field of accounting and finance. My firm has served as **Financial Management Consultants** to the World Bank. A number of young people, notably indigenes of Taraba State have qualified as Chartered Accountants under my tutelage. I ventured into politics in 2002 and have at various continuous times since 2003 been appointed Special Adviser, Commissioner and Chief of Staff (Government House Administration) upto the time I resigned towards the end of January 2018.

It is worth mentioning here too that I established a nursery/primary school in Jalingo in year 2000, and later a secondary school in 2006 which have since inception been adjudged amongst the best in Taraba State. In these schools, I started a scholarship program for children who are orphaned while in the school, and also select children amongst the **Kona, Mumuye and Fulani** who are indigenous to the school environment for full sponsorship all through their education from primary upto secondary education in our two schools. Such children are selected amongst the poorest families

found in the three ethnic groups. As at August 2016 when the accounts of the scheme were last audited, over 106 children had benefited from the scheme at an accumulated cost of over N12.1 Million.

I am deeply humbled by the progress I have so far made in life in the light of the brief background of my early life presented above. It is as a result of this that INTEGRITY, HARD WORK, CONTENTMENT, as well as SERVICE TO GOD AND TO HUMANITY have been the hallmark of my conduct in public life. Although these virtues landed me in several head-on collisions with the establishment in the course of my services as will be briefly highlighted later in this book, I remain grateful to God that He has kept me in close touch with my humble background, in spite of the privilege of enjoying uplifting in various spheres of my endeavor.

Chapter Two

MY POLITICAL CAREER:

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Sometime in 2002, a group of my friends, led by Barrister Musa Tende began to mount pressure on me, insisting that I had all that was needed to aspire to some form of political leadership as a representative of our people. Whatever informed their assessment of me was not clear to me, at least then. This is because by my very nature, it was, to me, unthinkable for any body to have associated me with politics. But the pressure from my friends kept mounting, and, at a point, they decided to arrange a meeting in Abuja so they could address me on their position. I remember very well that they numbered over ten, all of them from Donga Local Government Area. I was in Jos then, carrying out a World Bank Financial Management consultancy assignment my firm

won under the National Water Rehabilitation Project. After prayers and consultation with my wife, I was encouraged to proceed to Abuja to hear what my friends had to tell me. I remember my wife's advice then that if my friends insisted on me going into politics, I should not insist on staying off as I might not know what God had in stock for me. She was particularly concerned that if I shunned them after this long process of persuading me, they might feel slighted. She further opined that even if I accepted, it would still depend on God's final decision so I should not disappoint them on this issue. On these words of advice from my wife, I left for Abuja from Jos to meet with my friends.

The meeting at Abuja started at about 6:30 pm, and by about 9 pm, my friends had succeeded in convincing me to go into active politics, and to aspire to be elected into the House of Representatives under the People's Democratic Party, PDP. In accepting to go into politics, I told my friends that I had a dilemma which they had to help sort out. I explained to them that ordinarily, if I had my personal plans to go into politics, I would have first discussed it with Senator U J Yohanna (of blessed memory) who was a prominent politician from my immediate community. I felt taking a decision to go into politics without first discussing it with him was unfair and

disrespectful. On this, my friends resolved to take me to his house that very night so they could explain to him the processes that led to my decision, and why it was not possible for me to have discussed with him first. On the basis of this decision, we all moved in a convey to Senator U J Yohanna's house that same night. I remember meeting him with his friend late Comrade Paschal Bafyau watching the network news of the NTA. As expected, Senator U J Yohanna expressed shock on seeing the number and cream of young men that stormed his house at that time of the night.

Barrister Musa Tende spoke on behalf of my friends, explaining why they had to pressure me into politics, and why they had to take me to his house at that time of the night. I remember my friend Kungaba Soro buttressing the points put forward by Barrister Musa Tende. In response, Senator U J Yohanna expressed deep appreciation for such an extraordinary gesture exhibited by my friends. He expressed the deep respect he had for me and thanked my friends for doing what he would have been the one to do. With these words, he pronounced his support for our decision and advised that I should go home and consult with our people. We left his house that same night and went to inform Barrister Yakubu Tuktur about our decision. And on his advice that I should go

back home and consult with our people, we resolved that we should meet at Jos the following weekend to plan for my trip home.

It was on the strength of these and other developments that I obtained the nomination forms of the PDP and filed my papers to contest for the Party's primaries for the Takum/Donga/Ussa federal constituency. Six of us stood for the primaries which saw me emerge with the third highest votes. Because of the substantial votes I obtained, there was no clear winner in the first round of the elections as the Party's electoral rule then had it that the highest scorer of votes in the first round of elections must have obtained a minimum of 50% of the delegates' votes. That meant that the aspirants who came first and second had to go for a re-run delegates election. Hon. Sam Tsokwa and then Hon. Emmanuel Bwacha (now Senator) who came first and second respectively in the first round of elections, went in for the run-off which saw the latter emerge as winner, and also eventual winner at the general elections.

Having lost the primaries, I immediately congratulated the eventual winner with a congratulatory card. Honorable Emmanuel Bwacha was highly impressed by my spirit of

sportsmanship and decided to visit me in my house with a delegation of some of his close associates. That visit, after he had informed the Governor then about my gesture, became the beginning of my admission into the mainstream of Taraba State politics. I promised him on the spot that because of his decision to personally come over to appreciate my gesture, I had resolved to join his campaign team for the general elections. My response to his visit saw to my appointment into the Governor's Campaign Team as **Deputy Director (Operations)**. Added to this was my appointment by then Deputy Governor Sale Danboyi (of blessed memory) as **Secretary, Southern Zone Stakeholders Forum**. The roles played by then State Deputy Chairman of PDP, **late Hon. Yakubu Abwage** in these appointments are worthy of mention here.

The developments highlighted in this Chapter served as the launchpad for my fifteen years sojourn in the public service of Taraba State as captured in the subsequent Chapters of this book.

Chapter Three

MY STEWARDSHIP UNDER

GOVERNOR

Jolly
T. NYAME

His Excellency, Reverend Jolly T Nyame was re-elected and sworn in as Governor of Taraba State on 29th May, 2003. By then I had been almost fully integrated into the political structure of the Governor. Honourable Bwacha as he then was, Honourable Yakubu Abwage of blessed memory who then was the State Deputy Chairman of the PDP, the then immediate past Deputy Governor of Taraba State, then elected Senator representing the Southern Senatorial District, late Saleh Danboyi, and of course Honourable Istifanus Gbana all kept me close to their hearts. Beyond the wildest imagination of many, my political profile continued to soar. The Governor delayed the formation of his cabinet until sometime in September 2003.

And by the time he announced his cabinet, I was appointed Special Adviser on Economic Matters. This appointment was indeed very exciting to me for several reasons, principally because it served as a demonstration of the commitment of my above-named political mentors to my political uplifting.

My appointment elicited a great deal of excitement, both within my political group at home, and in my local Church, ECWA Bishara No 3 Kufai, Jalingo. My pastor proposed a Thanksgiving Service for my appointment, but I had to take time to explain to him that what was required was a special prayer session for me during one of the Sunday services. I was of the opinion that my appointment was a great responsibility that required God's divine grace for successful performance, and not time for feasting. To the glory of God, the pastor accepted my thinking about the appointment and called me and my family out for special prayers on a Sunday morning service.

I have every reason to thank God for the privilege His Excellency Governor Jolly Nyame granted me to contribute my quota to the service of our people. This singular privilege afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to society, governance, leadership, and a host of other privileges and challenges.

Under Governor Jolly T Nyame, I served in the following capacities:

Special Adviser on Economic Matters

Special Adviser on Finance and Economic Matters

Special Adviser, Due Process (I was the pioneer Chief Executive of this Office)

SPECIAL TASKS ACCOMPLISHED UNDER GOVERNOR JOLLY T. NYAME

The greatest challenge I had to contend with under Governor Nyame was in his strong belief in my professional standing and integrity. Although he did not know me in person before my appointment, it was very clear to me that all my political associates mentioned above had told him a lot about my personality. Many people close to him told me how he spoke glowingly about me. This, indeed, posed a big challenge to me. It is as a result of this that I feel the need to recount some of the challenging assignments His Excellency entrusted me with.

TARABA STATE ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT

The first assignment I carried out as Special Adviser on Economic Matters was the development of an **Economic Blueprint** for Taraba State. What surprised me about this idea of developing the Blueprint was the response of His

Excellency Governor Nyame after going through the document. On going through my presentation, His Excellency immediately summoned a **special Executive Council meeting** sometime in December 2003 during which I was invited to present the Blueprint. After my presentation at the Executive Council which lasted for about one-and-half hours, the document was adopted and was followed up by a **Taraba State Economic Summit** in 2004, in line with my recommendations. I felt highly honored, challenged and at the same time motivated by this singular response of His Excellency Governor Jolly Nyame.

THE TARABA CASSAVA PROGRAMME

When then President Obasanjo launched the Cassava initiative sometime in 2005, His Excellency, Governor Nyame directed me, along with then Commissioner of Agriculture and the Special Adviser on Poverty Alleviation to be on his entourage to the Presidential Villa, Abuja. The opening ceremony and papers presented on the first day were so interesting that I sought and got approval of His Excellency to participate in the technical sessions that would last for two days after the opening ceremony. My request was granted, and after the whole program, I returned to Jalingo and developed what I referred to as the **Taraba Cassava Program**, after series of meetings with stakeholders in the

agricultural sector, using the Taraba Agricultural Development Programme (TADP) as the prime driver of these efforts.

On presentation of the document to His Excellency the Executive Governor, he was impressed and immediately approved funds for the development of pilot **Improved Cassava Seed Farms** in the three Senatorial Zones of the State by TADP under my direct supervision. Improved Cassava Seedlings were also acquired and distributed to farmers across the length and breadth of Taraba State. This effort of His Excellency Governor Nyame largely explains the availability of improved Cassava species across the State at this moment.

It is to the glory of God and also to the credit of Governor Nyame that these processes led to the establishment of an ultramodern **Cassava Flour Mill** in Jalingo in collaboration with a Dutch company. I will never forget the comment His Excellency made in May 2007 when he was on inspection/commissioning of on-going/completed projects. At the Cassava Flour Company site, he asked for me to come over, and openly said, "**this is your baby**"! There couldn't have been a better way for a subordinate to be honored in public! I still feel those words in my life to date.

CLEAN-UP OF TARABA STATE BANK ACCOUNTS

If there was one area His Excellency Governor Nyame demonstrated his faith in my professional standing, it was in his decision to call me in to come up with a scheme that would bring back the State's financial position to a healthy state. By this decision, he instructed for my unfettered access to the State's financial information which enabled me develop a plan for his vetting. Thereafter, a Breakfast Meeting was arranged in Abuja which had only him, the then MD of Zenith Bank and my humble self in attendance. After our discussions at the Breakfast Meeting, the MD and I proceeded to his office in Abuja where we discussed details and agreed on the cleaning up of the accounts within seven months.

To the credit of His Excellency Governor Nyame, when I returned from my meeting with the MD and presented my proposals for the actualization of our target result, he wholeheartedly granted me approval and gave far-reaching instructions to the Manager of Zenith Bank Jalingo which included my direct monitoring and control of the State Government accounts with the Bank, despite the fact I was not the Finance Commissioner. With this, within just five months, the State Government bank accounts were sanitized.

How?

THE STATE PROJECTS COMPLETION COMMITTEE

One other area where Governor Nyame demonstrated his confidence in me was in his decision to set up a Committee to fast-track the completion of his on-going projects, a little over one year before the completion of his second term as Governor. He made me Chairman of the 7-man Committee which was made up mainly of Permanent Secretaries and the Accountant-General. This assignment afforded His Excellency an opportunity to know more about my personality.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DUE PROCESS OFFICE

About a year to the end of his administration, His Excellency Governor Nyame decided to establish the Due Process Office. On the recommendation of then SSG Danbaba Suntai, I was appointed Special Adviser, Due Process. I ran the office for about nine months before the end of his tenure in office as Executive Governor. During my brief stay in office, I developed a working document for the Office and designed the operational Forms, most of which are still in use in the Bureau for Public Procurement to date. By the time I presented my report at the end of his tenure, I had saved over N950 Million in costs for the Taraba State Government.

Chapter Four

MY STEWARDSHIP UNDER

GOVERNOR

Danbaba
DANFULANI SUNTAI

Late Governor Danbaba Danfulani Suntai had no problem assessing me because before he became Governor, we had worked together in the Cabinet of Governor Nyame when I was Special Adviser from 2003 to 2007. He started as Honorable Commissioner of Health and ended up as SSG, before emerging as Governorship candidate of PDP in the 2007 General Elections. His in-depth knowledge of my personality was made even easier because Special Advisers attended Executive Council Meetings as a policy of the then Governor Nyame. Added to this was the key role I played in the development of his campaign materials and strategies, given the short period of time he had to kick-start his campaign as a result of the circumstances that led to his emergence as the PDP Governorship candidate.

Under Governor Danbaba, I served as Commssioner of Finance in his first tenure, and Commissioner of Water Resources and Rural Development in his second tenure. Following the Supreme Court Judgement that returned His Excellency Sani Abubakar as Deputy Governor, and later as Acting Governor, I was appointed Honorable Commissioner for Economic Planning which lasted between November 2014 to May 2015. I wish to capture the roles I played in my first two appointments as the third appointment was overshadowed by election activities with nothing much to accomplish by the Ministry which was created on my appointment..

It is worthy of note that even though Governor Suntai ensured that the Party Caucus participated fully in the selection of members of the Executive Council, my appointment as Honorable Commissioner of Finance was solely his decision. In the case of Donga Local Government Council, he was to tell me and my other two colleagues who worked behind the scene for his election strategies, that he told the Caucus his mind was made up as to who he wanted as Commissioner and therefore did not need their input. It was in my own case that he even mentioned at the Caucus meeting the portfolio I was to occupy.

SPECIAL TASKS ACCOMPLISHED UNDER GOVERNOR DANBABA DANFULANI SUNTAI

1. TASKS AS COMMISSIONER OF FINANCE

SANITIZING OF THE PAYROLL SYSTEM AND EFFECTIVE CHECKS ON PAYROLL FRAUD

On assumption of duties as Commissioner of Finance, the first month of salary payment under my headship of the Ministry was that of July 2007. My preliminary review of the financial operations of the State brought to light the near absence of controls in the payroll system. I therefore decided to carry out a quick test on the integrity of the payroll system, using the July 2007 salaries as a reference point. This exercise resulted in the discovery of irregular payment of a total of about **N28 Million**. I immediately ordered for the return of this sum to the government Treasury and insisted that a copy of the Bank paying-in-slip must be submitted to my office.

With this discovery, I informed the Governor that the payroll system needed a complete overhaul. To his credit, he immediately set up a Personnel Audit Committee which was headed by Engineer D D Elisha. This was followed up by the

engagement by Governor Danbaba of Computer Consultants to deploy the **biometric data capture system** in the development of a new personnel database and payroll system for the State. My responsibility was to ensure that these two exercises which at a point went on concurrently, were successfully implemented. I therefore had to put in place strategies for the success of the projects. To do this, I set up a **Harmonization Committee** which I personally chaired.

Both the D D Elisha and the Consultants, **Softlinks Limited** did a wonderful job. We were however faced with the challenge of ensuring that the outcome of the work of the D D Elisha Committee and the biometric exercise were fully deployed to wipe out “ghost” workers and irregular placements on the payroll. This was where the Harmonization Committee which I personally chaired came in. As will be explained later in this booklet, the resistance to the work of the Harmonization Committee was beyond imagination! But to the glory of God, by the time we completed the implementation of the assignment, the wage bill of Taraba State was brought down by about **N227 Million per month!** This amounted to yearly savings of over **N2.7 Billion**. This was in addition to the high quality **Payroll Management Information System** developed by the Consultants. For

example, with the introduction of the biometric payroll system, it was very easy to monitor changes in the monthly payroll bills of the State with clear-cut analyses of reasons for all changes from the previous months.

To ensure that the savings achieved were not circumvented through other fraudulent means, I directed for a separate bank account to be opened with the main Bankers of the State into which the bulk of the gross salaries for the State was transferred. It was from that account that all net salaries to MDAs and remittances of all deductions were made. This measure effectively blocked the possibility of making multiple payment of salaries from the main account of the State.

THE GREATER JALINGO AfDB-FUNDED WATER PROJECT

While serving as Commissioner of Finance, I got elected as **Chairman of the Forum of Commissioners of Finance of Nigeria**. My election turned out to be a huge blessing for Taraba State as far as the actualization of the Greater Jalingo AfDB Water Project was concerned. At a point, the Bank had resolved to cancel the arrangement for Taraba and Oyo States which were tied to this single loan funding. This was because Taraba and Oyo States were not able to get the

Federal Ministry of Finance to obtain the approval of the National Assembly for the loan. Oyo State was going through some political turmoil at that point in time, and that contributed to the frustration of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

When the state of affairs was made known to me, I quickly reached out to the Hon. Minister of State Finance who was then Chairperson of the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC), and therefore one whom I worked closely with, to discuss on the way out of the situation. She immediately tabled the matter before the Honorable Minister of Finance who gave her the clearance to prepare the papers for presentation to the Senate, if it would be possible for me to reach out to the Senate Committee Chairman on Foreign Loans. I assured the Minister of State that she should leave the issue of the Senate Committee Chairman to me. I then quickly sought the audience of **Senator Anthony Manzo** who then took me to Senator Makarfi who was then Senate Committee Chairman on Foreign Loans. After explaining the plight of the State to Senator Makarfi in company of Senator Manzo, he offered to assist the best way he could.

It was on the strength of these contacts that Senator Makarfi called for an emergency meeting of his Committee for the

consideration and approval of the AfDB loan for Taraba and Oyo States. I attended the Committee sitting with the Honorable Commissioner of Water Resources and Rural Development along with his management, and responded to the questions of the Committee members on behalf of Taraba State. The sitting on the Taraba State afforded the Federal Ministry of Finance to call a few other States that had similar cases on very short notice to attend and obtain their approvals too.

It was the resolution of the Senate Committee that was used to save the Greater Jalingo Water Project from being cancelled by the AfDB at that first instance.

THE EXPOSURE OF IMMINENT PAYROLL CRISIS THROUGH MANIPULATED AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE LABOUR UNIONS (15%)

Sometime in 2008, I received a communication from the Special Adviser to the Governor on Labour Matters to the effect that the Governor had approved payment of 15% increment on salaries of workers which would amount to N70 Million per month, and that I was by this communication required to effect implementation. I immediately sent for the Special Adviser who came and confirmed that he wrote the

letter because he had been given the instruction by the Governor. I then told him that it was wrong for him to have written such a letter. I made it known to him that if there was such an instruction, it would come from the Establishment Department of the Office of the Head of Service with the **Salary Tables**. I therefore asked him to go and tell the Establishment Department of the Head of Service to submit the revised salary tables to me. When the Tables were submitted to me, I called the Accountant-General and instructed him to call the Computer Consultants who were working with them in their salary section to test the tables on the current staffing position and let me have the total salary bill for one month.

By the time the Accountant-General returned to me, he was vividly shaking, and told me that the total salary figures rolled out by the new Tables were just impossible for the state government to accommodate. I asked him what the total figure was but he said I should just forget about it because it was just impossible. I left it at that but later called the consultant who told me that with the new Tables, the State's salary figure would should shoot up to over **1.2 Billion Naira per month**, up from about **560 Million Naira** then. I immediately decided to go over to the Permanent Secretary

(Establishment) to find out about how they came about the new structure. It was then that he pulled out an Agreement that was signed between the State Labour Union and officials of the Taraba State Government on the strength of a Technical Committee Report. The Agreement which was signed in April 2007, barely a month before Danbaba's assumption of office stipulated that the Taraba State Government would pay **90% of Federal Consolidated Salaries!** It was at this point that I asked the Permanent Secretary whether "90% of Federal Consolidated" was the same as 15% salary increment. Besides, I asked whether the Governor was aware of this, and why they told him that the 15% salary increment would only amount to N70 Million per month. With these questions unanswered, I resolved that I would not instruct for the implementation of the new salary structure until the Governor returned from his annual leave.

On the return of the Governor, he met the state in a serious crisis with workers and Tarabans all calling for my sack. I was left alone to carry the cross of my decision as my family was subjected to intense pressure and even threats to our lives and properties. But to the glory of God, by the time the Governor returned from his trip, he realized that my decision had saved the State from a serious financial crisis as our

monthly share of the Federation Account then stood only at about N1.6 Billion on the average. In several meetings with stakeholders, even the government officials who signed the "Technical Report" and the main Agreement with Labour confessed before the Governor that they did not know what they signed, as they were not aware of the financial implications. With this, the Governor finally ruled that a new salary structure should be drawn up which would peg gross salaries of civil servants and political appointees at not more than **N850 Million per month.**

With the ruling of the Governor on this issue, I was vindicated, and the State was saved from a huge financial embarrassment, but the hatred generated against me never died down, as will be explained further in this booklet.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONDUCT OF FINANCE OFFICERS IN THE STATE

On my assumption of office, considering my professional standing and my body language, especially as highlighted above, all financial officers in Taraba State came to realize that I was not one who could easily be outsmarted in the business of financial operations. This understanding of my person brought about a great moral check on them. I

remember in those days the journalists were very fond of asking me how I managed to bring about a vivid stop in the extravagant display of wealth by some junior government workers since I took over as Commissioner of Finance. All I used to tell them in response then was that I did not know what they were talking about. But deep inside me, I knew what was happening.

2. TASKS AS COMMISSIONER OF WATER RESOURCES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

When His Excellency, late Danbaba Suntai was re-elected into office in 2011, my expectation was that he would not return me to his cabinet. This was because I felt that, having served fully in two Governors' tenures, he would deem it necessary to appoint someone else from my local government area as Commissioner. Instead, he went ahead and appointed two Commissioners from my local government area, returning me as **Commissioner of Water Resources and Rural Development**. After our swearing-in ceremony, he called me to his house and told me that he had decided to assign the Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development to me because I was very conversant with the World Bank workings and would therefore be very helpful in his quest to actualize the AfDB water project in Jalingo. At that point it dawned on me that he meant serious business when he declared in his 2011 inaugural speech that the only thing he would like to actualize for Jalingo in his second tenure was

the Greater Jalingo Water Project, as his attention would be focused more in the development of the rural areas.

With this challenge in mind, I had to immediately develop a robust relationship with officials of the African Development Bank. This afforded me with the opportunity of getting to know their requirements and also issues that needed to be addressed by the State Government. While my strivings for the actualization of the project was on, another move was made by the Management of the AfDB Headquarters to cancel the project. The reason bordered more on the slow response of Oyo State, than any fault of Taraba State. I got wind of the move and immediately went over to Abuja to see the Country Director on the way forward, considering the immense efforts Taraba State had put in to see to the actualization of the project. After intensive discussions with the Country Director on all available options, I offered to ask our Governor to visit him and assure him that the steps he had suggested would be taken. On my return, the Governor immediately moved over to Abuja together with key government officials from my Ministry. During the meeting, the Country Director openly acknowledged my efforts towards the actualization of the project, right from the time I was Finance Commissioner.

It is however very painful that although Governor Danbaba launched the Greater Jalingo Water Project on 24th October, 2012, he had a plane crash the following day, 25th October. The consolation I have is that, having expressed and demonstrated so much passion for the actualization of the AfDB water project for Jalingo, he was able to practically kick-start the project by launching it himself. As for me, I felt fulfilled and grateful to God that he lived to see me accomplish the task of ensuring that the project was finally approved for the State.

Chapter Five

MY STEWARDSHIP UNDER

GOVERNOR

Darius
DICKSON ISHAKU

My first close contact with Governor Ishaku happened when I was Commissioner of Water Resources and Rural Development while he was Minister of State, Power in the Federal Ministry of Power under President Goodluck Jonathan. I had gone to complain to him about how dissatisfied I was with the contractor handling the connection of Mararraban Baissa to the National Grid. He gave me quality time and we discussed a lot about how he would collaborate with the Taraba State Government to make things happen for the good of our people. I specifically requested that he should not approve payment to the contractor until he confirmed from me that there was light in Mararraba. On my part, I detailed my Director (Rural

Electrification) to monitor the contractors. On the advise of my Director, I secured approval from Governor Danbaba Suntai to effect some repairs to the internal distribution system so that the contractors would not have any excuse if Mararraba was not properly connected. **To my excitement, Governor Ishaku kept close touch with me all through the time the contractors were on site, and got my confirmation when Mararraba was fully connected to the National Grid before he approved their payment.** This was the singular thing that endeared him to my heart right from that time. From then on, I got very close to him, and when eventually he decided to run for the Governorship of Taraba State, it was not difficult for me to offer myself in the struggle for the actualization of his ambition. I became much closer to him when he joined us, and indeed championed the struggle for the liberation of Taraba State from the stranglehold of the agents of destruction and anarchy.

When he became the Governorship candidate of the PDP, I served in the Main Campaign Committee headed by then Acting Governor Sani Abubakar, from where I was selected to serve in the **8-man Working Committee** which was responsible for the planning and day-to-day implementation of the electioneering activities of the Governorship Candidate

of our Party. I also served in the **Transition Committee** of the Governor and **chaired the Finance Sub-Committee**.

I must quickly state here that my appointment as **Chief of Staff, Government House Administration** by Governor Ishaku came to me as a huge shock. This was so because just before he was due to be sworn in as Governor, I personally reached out to him and requested that he should not consider me for appointment into his cabinet. I told him I would prefer to “work from the background” through ad-hoc assignments. He asked me why I made that request, but after my explanations, he did not answer me a word. After he was sworn in, I sensed that his refusal to respond to my explanations was a likely pointer to the fact that he did not agree with me, so I reached out to one of his close political associates and requested him to re-convey my request to the Governor. He did and returned to tell me that the Governor asked him why I made that request, and that after explaining to him my reasons, the Governor just told him he would think about it. All that happened thereafter is now history because despite all these efforts, he went ahead and appointed me Chief of Staff.

SPECIAL TASKS ACCOMPLISHED UNDER GOVERNOR DARIUS DICKSON ISHAKU

My close working relationship with Governor Darius Ishaku during the struggles that followed the long absence of Governor Danbaba Suntai as a result of the plane crash, as well as in the campaign and political activities that followed the declaration of his intention all through to the campaigns and elections, afforded me the opportunity to hit the ground running as his Chief of Staff. This was because I had already got to know him as a man who had bundles of ideas that he expects whoever works closely with him to generate strategies for actualization. I also got to know him as one who is given to details and thoroughness. Armed with this understanding of him, it was not too difficult for me to position myself for the daunting tasks ahead of me.

The Rescue Teams (Grassroots and Revenue Teams) of the Governor which he has used extensively in many areas of his administration ranging from grassroots engagement, revenue monitoring, Women and Youth Empowerment and many other ad-hoc assignments is one of the strategic ideas that the Governor tasked me with. It was through this structure that the State Government was able to determine the **staffing**

position of ALL primary schools in Taraba State within TWO WEEKS by physically visiting all the primary schools in the State. Their reports were used to address the payroll fraud that had defiled all solutions, in spite of the committees set up at various times by the Governor to address the menace. Today, payroll records of all primary schools in Taraba State are being sanitized, using the reports of the Rescue Teams as a major tool.

I must conclude this section by emphasizing that, as Chief of Staff, my activities depended largely on the instructions of the Governor. It is therefore very difficult to begin to enumerate my "achievements" as Chief of Staff, as whether I achieved anything or not while I served in this capacity depends principally on his assessment of me. I have highlighted the areas above just in order to buttress the point I made earlier about Governor Ishaku's penchant for creativity.

Chapter Six

THE TRAVAILS OF MY STEWARDSHIP

In the course of my stewardship to the three consecutive administrations spanning a period of about fifteen years, my family and I went through trying times that I feel the need to document in this book for posterity to take note of. This is more so that our travails were predicated on my commitment to serve my principals with a deep sense of dedication in the interest of the people of Taraba State. Below are some of the bitter experiences.

THE 15% SALARY INCREMENT SAGA

I have explained in Chapter Four, the role I played in stopping the implementation of the salary structure which was arrived at on the basis of an Agreement between the Taraba State

Labour Union and some officials of government without the knowledge of Governor Danbaba Suntai. My stand which saved the state government from financial crisis turned out to be the very action that led to a widespread propaganda against my person by the Labour unions. This widespread propaganda which were carried out through union "bulletins" and distributed to all parts of Taraba State was the beginning of my portrayal by civil servants, and indeed a wide section of the people of Taraba State as the wicked man who was "misleading" Governor Danbaba Suntai. Labour bulletins even portrayed me as the person who misled the former Governor of Plateau State. How they came about this conclusion could not be imagined by any sane human being.

I must put on record here that the stress my family experienced in the course of this period of widespread propaganda against me was immeasurable. At a point, my wife who was already diabetic and hypertensive fainted and was rushed to the hospital. I must thank Governor Danbaba who showed me and my family tremendous support and solidarity on his return. On his return from leave, he heard what happened to my wife and immediately arranged for a dinner for me, my wife and his wife, and used that opportunity to encourage my wife in so many ways. At an Exco meeting, he also expressed his disappointment with members of the

State Executive Council for failing to stand by me during those trying times. How he got that information remains unknown to me to date.

To the credit of the **Christian Association of Nigeria and the Muslim Council, Taraba State chapters**, when they summoned me for a meeting and I explained everything to them, they stood by my position and started educating people on the true position of things. Even with this, the insults and daily issuance of "bulletins" by the Labour union continued unabated, with threats to burn down my house. For two weeks before the return of the Governor from his overseas leave, all members of my family were subjected to mental torture. But to the glory of God, as explained earlier, on the return of the Governor, my position was vindicated. **I had saved the state from a financial crisis at the risk of my life and that of my family for the interest of the people of Taraba State**, but the portrayal of my person as a wicked person with the accompanying insults continued amongst many in Taraba State.

On this issue, I give glory to God that He granted me the courage to stand on the side of **truth and loyal stewardship**, in spite of all the threats that my family and I faced in the hands of those who were bent on shortchanging the people of Taraba State.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PERSONNEL AUDIT REPORT AND THE BIOMETRIC PAYROLL SYSTEM IN 200

This exercise which I have also explained in Chapter Four was another issue that put me on a head-on collision with workers in Taraba State. This time around, the battle was not with the Labour union, but a situation deliberately created by government officials who were responsible for payrolls, and other high-ranking government workers who were beneficiaries of the old payroll systems that were conducive for their fraudulent activities. To ensure that the new exercise did not succeed, they made all efforts to muddle up the computerized salary print-outs in order to delay salaries and even short-pay workers. In the course of the work of the harmonization committee assignment which I personally chaired, it was discovered that some MDAs, on collection of their payroll print-outs and Cheques, went ahead to develop their own payrolls, cutting down workers' salaries. These activities resulted in delays in payment of salaries for as long as two weeks for some MDAs, in addition to incorrect payment of workers salaries. And the explanation to this was **“Rebo's computer payroll system that was delaying payment of salaries and short-paying workers”**. Coming not quite long before the 15% salary saga, it was very easy for the people of Taraba State to again pick on me and my family for another

“act of wickedness”!

By the time we discovered the root cause of this act of sabotage which affected mostly secondary school teachers and nurses in the State, the whole biometric payroll system stabilized and our reconciliation exercise was successfully completed with savings of N227 Million per month as presented earlier in Chapter Four. I must state here that officials of the Labour union in the State were part of the Harmonization Committee that I chaired, and made tremendous contributions to the success of the exercise.

Unfortunately, however, this exercise which exposed government officials who infested the State payroll with names of their children and other ghost workers has remained one reason why some people in the State still see me as the root cause of their sufferings at that time.

PERSONNEL AUDITS AND BIOMETRIC DATA CAPTURE UNDER THE GOVERNOR DARIUS ISHAKU ADMINISTRATION

On assumption of office, **His Excellency, Governor Darius Ishaku** got wind of irregularities that abounded in the payroll system of the State as a whole. He therefore decided to look into the payrolls of the State Civil Service, Local Government workers, as well as primary school teachers. The Governor

engaged banks and consultants who carried out the exercises with the involvement of Committees he set up.

When the exercises started with the state civil service payroll, they ran into hitches that resulted in omissions, short-payments, and even delays in payment of salaries. Most of these hitches are normal with exercises of this nature, but at a point in time, they continued unabated, and grew worse. Even the Governor himself observed the anomalies and began to question why the Committees, Consultants and the banks were subjecting workers to the untold hardships. Local government workers and primary school teachers were worst affected by these anomalies.

To my surprise, the whole State went wild with accusations that I was the cause of the hardships being faced by the workers. Insinuations were spread that the Consulting firms carrying out the assignments belonged to me. At two separate incidents, pastors openly attacked my person in the presence of the Governor during church services to the effect that I was causing untold hardships for workers in the State. The attacks were made in my presence in the two different congregations.

One other pastor impressed me greatly when he sought audience with me to find out exactly what was happening regarding accusations against me about local governments

and teachers salaries. I was shocked when he told me that someone who came to lament to him about me even said N300 Million had been paid to my firm. **By the time I explained to him how I was never involved in the decisions, constitution of committees and appointment of consultants and bankers for the staff verification exercises, he was shocked to his nerves.** I used that opportunity to explain to him what happened in the past when I was Commissioner of Finance. He left my office highly relieved, but also sad about what people were saying about me. He said he was relieved because of my explanations, but very sad that people could go ahead and say such unprintable things about me without finding out what the true position of things were.

The only time I officially got involved in the state payroll exercise was when, sometime in 2017, the Governor received a report from the Auditor-General of the State on numerous observations his office had made regarding the state payroll biometrics and computerization. On receipt of the report, he summoned a meeting of all the relevant state officials which included the Head of Service, and the Consultants. It was in that meeting that the Auditor-General in his explanation mentioned that a copy of the report was made available to me and I had responded by directing them to carry out certain exercises and report back to me. On hearing the Auditor-

General's report that I had written to guide on what should be done, the Governor then sent for me to join the meeting. It was in that meeting that I had a heated argument with the Consultant when I tried to point out the things that they were not doing correctly. After listening to me and how I silenced the consultant, the Governor immediately ended the meeting by directing that the consultants should from then on take instructions from me on the way forward to resolve all outstanding issues. **That was the first time I was officially involved in the state civil service payroll computerization project.** It was from that time that I stopped the production of our payrolls from the Abuja office of the consultants and ordered for the immediate involvement of staff that the state government had engaged and trained for that purpose in the production of our monthly payroll. These measures, together with certain reports that I prescribed for the consultants, immediately stabilized the monthly production of the state payrolls.

Just as it happened in the case of the State payroll, I only got officially involved in the biometrics and computerization of the primary school salaries when I obtained approval in the monthly report presentation of the Rescue Teams as earlier explained in Chapter Five. The Team I put in place sanitized the primary schools payrolls, using the reports of the Rescue Teams as well as the Forms I designed for their use. By the

time I resigned my appointment as Chief of Staff, the Team had flushed out all fraudulent employments and restored names of all genuine teachers who were removed from the payroll and replaced by illegal and "ghost" workers. "Ghost" schools that were discovered in the course of the physical verifications carried out by the Rescue Teams were flushed out. What the Team was still working on by the time I left was the computation of arrears of genuine teachers who were removed from the payroll by the Committee on staff verification. **Here too, I only officially got involved in the teachers salary issue after the earlier Committee had muddled up the whole exercise.** The only exercise that I did not get involved in all through to its conclusion was that of the local government workers.

It is my hope and prayer that the people of Taraba State who have been brainwashed into believing that I caused the salary problems of Taraba State will by now understand all that happened regarding salaries of workers in the State and appreciate, rather than condemn me for the roles I played in the issues.

THE 2012 FLOOD DISASTER FUND SACK

I initially did not want to include this incident amongst the travails of my stewardship. This was because I felt the issue had to do with a number of us in the cabinet of Governor

Danbaba who would not succumb to the plot of then Acting Governor who wanted to push his boss out of power without minding the misfortune that befell him as a result of the plane crash. On a second thought, I felt all I went through at that time along with other members of the cabinet was a price I had to pay for my loyalty to Governor Danbaba. Of course, there can be no stewardship without loyalty.

In 2012, Taraba State was one of the States in Nigeria that suffered from the devastating effects of the floods that were experienced in different parts of the country. N400 Million was released as grant to the State for the provision of relief materials to the affected areas. Then Governor Danbaba Suntai set up a Committee, chaired by then Deputy Governor Garba Umar. Two sub-committees were set up under the main committee headed by the deputy governor. I was a member of sub-committee "A" which was chaired by then Hon. Commissioner of Agriculture, Anthony Jellason. The two sub-committees were to procure the relief materials and hand them over to the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) who were charged with the responsibility of distributing the relief materials. Another committee was set up to carry out market surveys and give us unit prices within which we should procure the relief materials.

Our committee successfully completed the assignment and submitted our report which showed **savings of about N4.6 Million**. But to our surprise, sometime in the second half of 2013, long after we had completed our assignment and submitted our report, we heard that the House of Assembly had set up an investigation panel to probe the activities of the Flood Disaster Committee. The probe centred on the two sub-committees for procurement. That took place shortly after the leadership of the House of Assembly had been forced out, allegedly under the dictates of then Acting Governor Garba Umar. The House panel was therefore meant to deal with the Danbaba loyalists in the cabinet. But instead of removing us from office which he had powers to do, he was ill-advised to indict us and use the indictment as reason for sacking us from the cabinet. Unfortunately, however, the evil intention behind the setting up of the Panel was so glaring that the then SSG, Ambassador Emmanuel Q Njiwa who was only a member of the main committee chaired by the Acting Governor himself, and was not involved in the Procurements, was included in the list of cabinet members sacked on the strength of the House panel report which in fact contained no serious indictments that could have warranted our sack. Besides, even for those of us who were sub-committee members, the sack was selective and drew public suspicion and condemnation.

Immediately our sack was announced, EFCC were brought in, ostensibly to commence the process of our humiliation. But on going through the House Panel report, they saw nothing serious in it, and so did not arrest any of us. By the time our sub-committee chairman and the secretary were invited to Abuja by the EFCC, they submitted copies of our sub-committee report, and with their explanations, no other member of sub-committee "A" was invited again. ICPC invited us, but by the time we all got there, they had studied our report and only asked the sub-committee chairman to submit a statement clarifying about five issues. Thereafter, we were all asked to return to Jalingo. All these were clear indications that we had done nothing wrong about which we were accused. Although in the end, our secretary was charged to court for failure to remit the N4.6 Million saved by our sub-committee, the fact still remains that we were not guilty of embezzling N400 Million as was being propagated by the government at that time, although only N296 Million was given to the two committees for procurement.

In spite of the above, government under then Acting Governor Garba Umar subjected us to untold stress and public ridicule through sustained media propaganda, spending huge public funds in the process. I was at the forefront of the battle to let the whole world know the real essence of our sack. By this time, we were joined by eight members of the House of

Assembly, made up mostly of the leadership that were sacked in the plot to unseat Governor Danbaba by all means. These two blocs of the initial victims of the Garba Umar plot were later joined by some members of the National Assembly from Taraba State, other political gladiators from the State and members of the cabinet who either resigned or were dropped by the Acting Governor Garba Umar from the cabinet for their refusal to go along with him in his plot. To the glory of God, it was on this platform which was fondly referred to as **the cabals** by the Garba Umar-led Government that the present government in Taraba State secured the victory which saw to the emergence of **His Excellency, Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku**.

OTHER SUNDRY UNFOUNDED ACCUSATIONS

Added to the specific public accusations outlined above were cases of individuals who, without iota of proof, hung their personal problems with the Governor on me. Others felt their expectations from the Governor by way of appointments and all forms of favor did not materialize because I stopped the Governor from doing so. The unfortunate thing about this class of accusers is that it was made up of highly educated and enlightened members of society. Such reports about me were broadcast in some places of worship and public gatherings. In all these, I give glory to God who is judge over all things, and who knows my heart and my works.

Chapter Seven

Taraba State:

MY CANDID OPINION ON THE WAY FORWARD

Taraba State can rightly be described as the richest in Nigeria, barring our huge dependence on oil revenues as a nation. With the third largest landmass in Nigeria, every inch of this landmass is either richly endowed with mineral resources, massively rich agricultural potentials, or tourism havens. In terms of Human Resources, with the highest in terms of the number of ethnic nationalities than any other State in Nigeria, Taraba prides itself with a wealth of cultural resources that no other State in this country can boast of. Added to this is the wealth of intellectual capacities associated with these diverse ethnic nationalities.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS ACRIMONIES - THE NEED FOR A RE-THINK

Since creation in 1991, however, in spite of all the human and natural endowments we are blessed with as a State, we allowed ethnic and religious bigotry to be at the front burner of our existence as a people. In 1992, barely a year after creation, we witnessed an unfortunate and shameful religious crisis in Jalingo which was sparked off by students of the then Government Science School Jalingo, and immediately spread to the city centre like wild fire. Since then, countless other ethno-religious crises have been experienced by our people.

There is no gainsaying that these crises have remained the single most prominent cause of our inability to be where we should have been by now. The most unfortunate thing about this shameful state of affairs is the fact that there is hardly any local government in the State where these people of divergent ethnic nationalities are not extensively interwoven by virtue of inter-ethnic marriages and even settlements. Extensive inter-religious relationships also abound in this State. Some years back, I had to determine the conditions for releasing my

Muslim niece who was with me to her suitor. This is how a great deal of communities in Taraba State live their lives. With these, I have found it very difficult to understand why Taraba State is not a shining example in Nigeria for a harmonious ethno-religious society.

As a people so extensively interwoven in ethno-religious colorations, there is the need for us to begin to look at this as our source of strength and progress, rather than a source of division and acrimony. Our religious and traditional institutions must take the lead in addressing this issue with the strong support of the Taraba State Government. The present state of affairs must not be allowed to continue. I suggest here that government should, as a matter of top priority, introduce **Taraba State Annual Cultural Festival**. Committee memberships of this festival should cut across ethnic, religious and political party lines, and should form a major part of the annual calendar of activities of the State. Added to this, the **Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter** and the **Muslim Council, Taraba State Chapter** should come out with ideas of programs that they can co-sponsor without government involvement. This I believe will

strengthen their bond of unity and mutual respect for each other, and build a practical platform for resolution of potential conflicts before they occur.

POLITICAL INCLUSIVENESS

For me, the successful “power shift” to the Southern Senatorial Zone in the 2015 general elections is a milestone in the achievement of political inclusiveness in Taraba State. I must salute our political elites from the Northern and Central Senatorial Zones who saw to the actualization of this feat that hitherto was thought to be impossible. It is my considered view that this arrangement should be allowed to continue in a circular order. We must not make the mistake of Plateau State where the immediate past Governor, having completed his tenure, wanted the next round to start from his zone again.

The second most important thing that the political class must avoid is the mistake of the 2015 general elections which was bedeviled by religious sentiments at the detriment of the unity of the people of Taraba State. This mistake must be avoided at all cost. As stated earlier, we in Taraba State are so interwoven that we cannot afford the practice of ethnic and

religious politics. With this, we will easily avoid the danger of political exclusivity that many citizens of the State are crying out against at this moment.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

During my fifteen years of sojourn in the public service, one major observation I made was that the Taraba State civil servants have not been given their pride of place in the governance of the State. The situation has become so bad that even the civil servants themselves do not understand that they are the engine room of government. Civil servants in the state are lacking in self-confidence because over the years, they have been left alone without training and re-orientation.

I am of the opinion that if civil servants are accorded the desired attention and adequately challenged, they will perform creditably and help to move the State forward. I can testify that while serving as Commissioner in the then Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development, professional/technical staff of the Ministry showed great skills and ability to execute certain projects by far better and cheaper than most contract jobs. The notion that they can be discarded in the scheme of things is not doing us any good in the State.