**Synopsis of ‘HOW STATES ARE GOVERNED: A First-Hand Account by Nigerian Governors’**

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How governors tackle the developmental challenges that they are elected to solve, in practical terms, is a topic that is often not written about. The situation is made more difficult by the fact that Nigerian Governors seldom write memoirs, and that biographies about them often talk about what they did, rather than how they did it. The Nigerian Governors’ Forum (NGF) Secretariat has been compiling and publishing the Inauguration speeches by new governors for some years now but handing over notes (where they exist) would often focus on what is being handed over, rather than how thorny challenges were addressed and how such future challenges could be tackled.

The Nigerian Governors Forum has also been organising induction sessions for incoming governors, like this one, for a few years now. These are often 3–4-day events that take place before new governors assume office to be faced with the realities of having to deliver peace and prosperity for their citizens. The advice given by their predecessors are often well intended but generic, and tend not to go into the nitty gritty of issues such as how to boost the state’s economy, improve the civil service, work with the state House of Assembly, manage insecurity and conflict, tackle bureaucratic corruption, integrate Local Government into state economic development, or the delicate balance between politics and competence when selecting commissioners and special advisers. Also, at these retreats, 4 years can seem a very long time for new governors and the thought of working towards legacy from the first day in office is often not at the top of the mind.

Although, in Nigeria, the Federal Government has perhaps an overbearing effect of the consciousness of citizens, particularly as it controls monetary policy, defence, internal security, international relations and mineral resources, and consumes 52% of all available resources in the Federation Account, the effects of government policies and actions, as well as many day-to-day issues of development or underdevelopment, are felt sharply at state level. The Nigerian Constitution places some of the most important development issues, like Health and Education, in the Concurrent Legislative List, which makes it the joint responsibility of the different tiers of government. Many Constitutional provisions relating to Local Government Administration are contradictory and unclear. In terms of security, Governors are nominally the ‘Chief Security Officers’ of their states but they lack direct control over the armed forces, the police or the security agencies in their own states. As the Igbo proverb goes: the goat collectively owned by everybody dies of hunger.

Still, state governors have enormous opportunities and powers to affect the lives of citizens. A determined and committed state governor can make a huge difference to the lives of citizens. They can bring forth growth-enhancing infrastructure, tackle hunger and disease, improve basic education and health, tackle unemployment, reduce communal conflicts and promote harmony within their states. Some Governors have continued to deliver public goods even amid insurgency and terrorism. Others have found ways to deliver high quality infrastructure with relatively modest resources. Yet others have made appreciable improvements in human capital development in their states, and some have found ways to tackle rising unemployment, particularly among the youth. How have they managed to do it?

It is for these reasons, the Nigerian Governors Forum Secretariat requested each serving governor to write about 10 pages on how the have tackled a specific governance challenge that they are seen by the public and their peers to have done well in tackling. Governors were encouraged to write in their own words, or elect to be interviewed, rather than have it written for them by their communication advisers or professional writers, and their writings are being compiled in a book titled ‘How the States Are Governed: A First-Hand Account by Nigerian Governors.’ The book takes a pragmatic, rather than an academic, approach. It attempts to get Governors to focus on specific governance issues and how they have tried to address them, in their own words. The experiences they narrate in tackling these challenges are not infallible templates but should still be of use to new and aspiring governors. They will also help to inform the public about state-level governance in Nigeria, an area that is under-researched and for which there is very little literature.

I have the honour and privilege of editing the book and the Chapter 1 provides an overview of subnational governance in Nigeria. In Chapter 2, Governor Udom Emmanuel of Akwa Ibom State focuses on Public Service Delivery. Referencing Abraham Lincoln’s definition of democracy as “a government of the people, by the people and of the people’, he analyses the responsibility of the state governor to navigate the landmines of individual and group interests to bring forth a government that is truly for the people. He also addresses the challenge of executing vision through others and ensuring that the vision of serving the people is not derailed by the entrenched interests of a minority that may be benefitting from a dysfunctional system. Employing a can-do philosophy, the challenge of finding solutions rather than dwelling only on problems, became paramount. This has resulted in successful businesses like Ibom Air, the Jubilee Syringe Manufacturing Company (said to be the largest in Africa) and the Ibom Peacock Paint Company. These were achieved in an institutional environment in Africa where state-owned enterprises tend to fail. Akwa Ibom has also seen more connections to the national electricity grid than before, more feeder roads in rural areas and a general hospital in each of its 10 federal constituencies. How were these possible?

In Chapter 3, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa of Delta State relays his experience in developing human capital in the state. Recognising the benefits of disciplined development planning and holding officials to account for delivery, he developed two 4-year State Medium Term Development Plans between 2015 and 2023. Using the plans, he focused on training and skills development to tackle youth unemployment; entrepreneurship development; enhancing the access and quality of education and improving healthcare for all through the introduction of universal health coverage, the first state in the country to do so. The Delta State Contributory Health scheme currently has more than 1 million enrolees and Delta State was ranked as the ‘Best State in Human Capital Development’ in the 2017 State peer Review conducted by the National Competitiveness Council of Nigeria. Given Nigeria’s generally poor human capital development indices, how was it possible for Delta State to make progress in this area?

In what has been described as the ‘Ebonyi Miracle’, Governor Dave Umahi of Ebonyi State shares insights as to how he was able to achieve remarkable infrastructural development with limited resources in Chapter 4. In the last 8 years, Ebonyi has built more than 1,500 kilometres of roads, including 25 kilometres of concrete roads in each of the 13 local government areas. With one of the lowest allocations from the Federation Account, Ebonyi has also built an international airport, a shopping mall, a modern market, a new government house complex, 14 twin flyovers, an international airport and a university of medical sciences. Apart from infrastructural development, Ebonyi has acquired a reputation for prudence, transparency and accountability. It was rated as ‘The Most Prudent State in The Use of Public Resources’ and the best state in capital budget implementation and investment in projects by BudgiT in 2021. In the State Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) scheme implemented by the World Bank and the Federal Ministry of Finance, Ebonyi was recognised as an ‘Excellent Performer’ in 5 different categories: Fiscal Transparency and Accountability; Increased Domestic Revenue Mobilisation; Efficiency of Public Expenditure; Debt Sustainability; and Overall Performance on All Disbursement-linked Indicators. Is there a correlation between the outstanding infrastructural development and fiscal and financial prudence? Or is it the use of direct labour, being that the governor is a renowned engineer? Or is it a combination of all these factors?

In Chapter 5, Dr Kayode Fayemi, former Governor of Ekiti State reflects on two terms of office separated by a 4-year interregnum. His reflections are particularly poignant given his background as a civil society activist and an intellectual, but also as someone who lost his re-election bid after his first tenure to the now-infamous ‘stomach infrastructure’ phenomenon. Based on a roadmap to make poverty history in Ekiti State by focusing on human capital development, it was additionally important to undertake projects such as the Ikogosi Tourist Centre and the resuscitation of the Ire Clay factory because the electorate wants to see tangible projects. These helped to increase internally generated revenue from N109m in 2010 to an average of N1 billion per month by 2022. His reflections include preparing for public office, funding the vision and mission, leadership as service and sacrifice, the role of the civil service, public communication, and leading with legacy in mind. How did he handle the tension between the immediate gratification of ‘stomach infrastructure’ and navigating Ekiti towards ranking in the top five of states least affected by multidimensional poverty? Given that the people of Ekiti have always had a strong affinity for education, did it organically become the state with the highest enrolment and lowest out of school children without any government effort or were there specific interventions that produced this result? What lessons did he learn particularly in his second term?

In Chapter 6, Governor Muhammed Badaru Abubakar of Jigawa State explains the factors behind the state being one of the best managed states in the country over the last 24 years, even though its receipts from the Federation Account are quite low. He emphasises purposeful leadership and effective governance institutions anchored on a Jigawa State Comprehensive Development Framework that has been in place for decades. How do you bring out the best in the public service to promote “maximum welfare, freedom and happiness” in an environment where there is low federal allocation and limited private sector activity?

In Chapter 7, Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State explains how he is tackling one of the most difficult challenges facing any Nigerian governor today: the knotty issue of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment in Nigeria is currently running at over 40%. Focusing on job creation through agricultural and rural development, the Ondo State government made available 100,000 hectares of land for oil palm and cocoa production. How was Ondo State able to create the enabling environment that resulted in 15,000 self-sustaining jobs, in addition to recruiting 6,000 additional public servants in critical areas? How has the Ondo State Enterprise Agency been able to train 10,000 people in various skills, including changing the focus of some youth from internet crime (known as ‘419’ or ‘yahoo yahoo’) to making legitimate money through digital entrepreneurship?

In Chapter 8, Governor Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia State offers a brief but impactful commentary on Local Government administration in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria contains many contradictions about the nature and role of local governments in Nigeria. In one section alone (Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution) it places responsibility for local government revenue on three different bodies: the state government; the National Assembly; and the state House of Assembly. These Constitutional contradictions have been used by some governors to render local governments ineffective in their states. Unlike many states, Abia has elected local government chairpersons and a functioning, collaborative system devoid of interference by the state governor. How was he able to achieve this and what difference has it made?

In Chapter 9, Governor Simon Lalong of Plateau State explains how he manages diversity in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. With some 53 different ethnic groups practicing various religions, the management of diversity in such a plural society is crucial for peace and harmony. He emphasises fairness in political appointments, a dedicated agency to foster dialogue and reconciliation, and the use of community development and youth groups to foster peaceful coexistence. Given that Plateau State has been a melting pot for diverse groups for years, how does one go about maintaining peace and harmony without the exclusive power of coercive force that state governments lack?

In Chapter 10, Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno State reflects on his first 4 years as governor and details how he is managing to deliver development despite daunting security challenges. He also offers a wide of range of tips to new governors on topics such as tackling the balance between politics, loyalty, friendship and productivity in making appointments, managing the public service such that you are not caged by it, the benefits of realistic and adjustable plans and the need to be careful with the promises made for the first 100 days or the first year (particularly important to ensure that transition committees do not over-promise). Interestingly, he starts his reflections with a section titled ‘Greenhorn at the mercy of close aides, friends and associates.’ It is particularly interesting that he saw himself as a greenhorn, given that he had been a civil servant, local government official, lecturer and political appointee as a commissioner. Given the tutelage that he had had before he became governor, what surprised him when he got into office?

**QUESTIONS FOR DG NGF**

1. Should we still give serving governors until May 29 to submit write ups for the Volume 1 or should we go with the 9 that we already have we already have?
2. Should we include any papers presented by governors at this retreat, given that some (like the ones by el-Rufai and Sanwo-olu) are on topics that we had asked them to write about for the book?