

**GOODWILL MESSAGE AT MEDIA BRIEFING ON THE STATE PEER REVIEW MECHANISM ON 3 JULY, 2012, BY DR. JOE ABAH, NATIONAL PROGRAMME MANAGER, DFID-SPARC PROGRAMME**

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me start by introducing our programme, the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC). SPARC is the largest governance programme of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). Its main focus is to work with selected governments to ensure that they use their own resources better to serve their citizens. A 2006 USAID study on Nigeria's economic performance found that the sum total of all donor aid in Nigeria amounts to less than 1% of Gross National Income. Therefore, it is clear that if Nigeria is to reduce its poverty, it can only do it with its own resources, not with donor aid. This is why my programme focuses on helping governments to use their own resources better to serve their people.

As pressmen and women, the first questions that you will ask me are: Is any of it actually working? Is anybody actually listening to you? Believe it or not, my answer is Yes. I will give you an example from just one activity that we have undertaken in a number of states. By reducing the number of bank accounts in Jigawa from 615 to 105, the Jigawa State Government recovered N2 billion which it was able to put back into its budget; Kano reduced its own from 756 to 92 and thus recovered N4.5 billion; Enugu reduced its number of accounts from 100 to 10 and was able to put back N1.6 billion into its treasury; the return of unspent funds in Jigawa at the end of 2009 yielded N9.3 billion which went into the 2010 budget, and this has since become a standard annual practice. These are in addition to savings from removing ghost workers, improving due process in procurement, reducing the size of state debt, and ensuring that gains from the Debt Relief granted Nigeria in 2005 by the Paris Club of Creditors are used to improve maternal and child health, fight malaria and improve water supply in various parts of the country.

Given the plethora of challenges facing the country, it is easy to believe that nothing works. This belief is erroneous. It is common knowledge worldwide that even in the most difficult environments, some things do actually work. It is easy to focus on the fact that the Imo State Government has a Special Assistant on Comedy Matters, but to ignore the fact that the current Imo governor has given up his security vote and salary and that this are being used to provide school children with books, uniforms and even pocket money. It is easy to focus exclusively on the security situation in the north (important as it is to do so), but to ignore the fact that every disabled person in Jigawa State gets a monthly allowance of about N7,000 so that they do not have to beg on the streets to survive. It is easy to focus on the number of students failing WAEC and NECO exams, or on the industrial dispute that the Ekiti State Government has with its teachers, rather than on what the governor there is trying to achieve. The issue in Ekiti is that the government insists that teachers should take exams to prove that they are competent to teach the children. What are the teachers afraid of? When a similar test was conducted in Kwara State's primary schools in 2008, only 75 teachers passed, out of 19,000 that were tested. The test conducted was for basic literacy and numeracy at Primary 4 level! When the teachers in Ekiti take the exams and fail, you will start seeing phrases like "soft landing" and "human face" in the papers. When your son fails WAEC, does he get a soft landing? Does NECO wear a human face? The media is the conscience of the nation. What do you think? Please remember that there are millions of jobless graduates roaming the streets looking for teaching jobs. Does the public service exist to serve the public or the public servant?

Not many people know that our northern states were able to reduce the incidence of polio by 99% between 2009 and 2010; or that the Kwara State Government was calling out the communities to

verify whether or not a road contractor should be paid the next instalment and that any payment was done on site in full view of the people; or that every community in Anambra State is now connected to the road network; or that Ondo State has dramatically reduced the incidence of women dying at childbirth; or that Yobe State is incentivising midwives to go to rural areas and getting husbands to sign blanket approvals for their wives to attend antenatal clinics. I could go on and on, but will not. The point I am making is that even in Yobe, with all its challenges, some things are working. The same is the case in all our states.

*Report back*

This brings me to the role of the media in development. Professor Adele Jinadu will talk in some detail about this, but permit me to highlight just a few issues. In her book documenting her experiences in NADFAC, Dora Akunyili attributes a large part of NAFDAC's success to the support that it enjoyed from the media. Indeed, she said "we were bounced into action by the media" stating that NAFDAC would have moved more slowly but for the media. When Ribadu was first appointed the Chairman of EFCC, the first constituency that he went to was the media in order to seek their support for the war against corruption. In a 2009 survey, funded by the British High Commission, the EU and the UN, 99% of respondents were aware of EFCC compared to 59% for ICPC (despite the fact that ICPC had existed since 2000 and EFCC was only set up in 2004). Although the actual verifiable performance statistics tell a different story, many people perceive that the effectiveness of both organisations has since declined. In fact, they have both continued to perform relatively well on their core mandates. Tafa Balogun stole N10 billion. Cecilia Ibru forfeited N150 billion when jailed. But when an organisation loses credibility and public support, the amount of money recovered from corrupt bankers, as a performance measure, becomes insignificant. It was therefore no surprise that Farida Waziri was sacked despite recovering more money than Ribadu.

The media is often not taken-in by rhetoric. It wants to see tangible, demonstrable results, and is impatient for improvement (and rightly so) on behalf of ordinary citizens. However, there can sometimes be too much of a focus on the negative. Indeed, the media itself also suffers from this focus on the negative. Rather than a focus on the fact that Nigeria has one of the freest media in the developing world, people accuse the media of focusing only on brown envelopes, not checking facts before they publish and being biased. Even the insurgents in the north have their own issues with the media, as we all know.

The programme that we are here to brief you about today is something positive that you can focus on. It is about state governors coming together to devise a system for reviewing each other's performance and finding ways to learn good practices from each other for the benefit of their people. Yes we have issues with our governors, but when all 36 of them come together like this for the common good, let us at least give them the benefit of the doubt, rather than cause the 'infant mortality' of any good initiative through negative and uninformed reporting, simply because bad news sells more newspapers. You have a crucial role to play if our country is to improve. By highlighting what is working well in some places and reporting what is not working well in other places, you can start to place pressure on everyone to improve. This you will have an opportunity to do by participating in this State Peer Review Process. I thank you for making time out of your busy schedules to attend this morning's event. I hope that you find it useful and informative and that you will ask challenging questions during the question and answer session later.

Thank you and God bless.