

## Peer Reviewing Nasarawa State

By

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Nasarawa was the fourteenth state visited during the last segment of the exercise which kicked off in July, 2009. The Peer Review Team of the Nigeria Governors' Forum under the leadership of the Director-General of NGF, Mr. Asishana B. Okauru traversed the length and breadth of the state and were shown projects across all sectors of the economy for four solid days even far into the nights. Below are highlights of the tour:

### **YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SKILLS ACQUISITION CENTRE**

One of the greatest projects embarked upon by the Nasarawa State Government which is a best practice that should be emulated by all states is the vocational training for youth being run by the Nasarawa State Vocational and Relevant Technology Board which was established by Edict No. 18 of 1998. The objectives are, among others,

- \* To train youths in skills acquisition
- \* To encourage the individual to develop his/her own talent
- \* To teach new skills and improve on those already acquired while emphasizing innovation and creativity.
- \* To reduce unemployment and increase the earning capacity of school leavers
- \* To minimize rural-urban migration
- \* Find ways to integrate ex-trainees into their communities.

Some of the prospective trainees are those who opted for such training without any academic background or school dropouts. Some of the courses on offer are Welding/Metal Fabrication,

Woodwork/Capentry, and Electrical/Electronics. Others are building Technology, Home Economics and Motor Mechanics.

The team visited the four skills acquisition centres at Lafia, Doma, Wamba and Nasarawa and saw an assortment of machines and the boys and girls undergoing training in their various fields.

Undoubtedly, this is a big investment in the future of the youth that will in the near future minimize the phenomenon of youth unemployment in the state, but the team would suggest that the numeracy and the language content of the programme be enhanced in order to enrich it and , at the same, enable graduands to negotiate better deals for themselves in the market-place, post-graduation.

### **SALT PROCESSING PLANT, KEANA**

This plant is purely indigenous technology for extracting table salt from local salt deposits. It has been in operation locally for ages and all it needs is modernization and refining. This the government is doing by assembling a team of poly, varsity scientists to try to modernize it, and consequently, some of the villagers who were formerly into it and left when they felt there was no future in it are now coming back. The state government has mandated the state polytechnic to go into research to eliminate firewood as a source of heating.

### **WORKS & HOUSING**

There are lots of works and housing projects ongoing in Nasarawa for the benefit of the citizens. Some of them are constructed through direct labour and others through contract awards. Depending on the circumstances, decisions are taken on the mode of construction.

One of the most important housing projects embarked upon by the state is the state House of Assembly edifice which is being handled by an indigenous contractor for N1.7billion including furnishing. After some initial delay on design, work started on the six - month project in February this year. Four High Court buildings are being put up in Lafia



(3) and Nasarawa (1) at a cost of N38m each by Triple Eight Engineering Ltd.

# The most important project carried out through direct labour in the state is the New Secretariat Building. Formerly, ministries were dispersed all over the town but with the near completion of the facility for N348m in less than two years, 5 of 13 ministries have been accommodated in the bungalows. This certainly is a best practice. Apart from the direct labour which is a cost-saving measure, skills of ministry's workers are enhanced.

Another example of the government's effort at provision of amenities and local capacity building is the Ara Rural Electrification Project. This contract was awarded to Mallam Hassan Haske of Haske Nig. Ltd of Akwanga. He has subsequently used it as a reference to bid for an Abuja project for which he has been pre-qualified.

### HEALTH

Going through Nasarawa leaves one in no doubt that the state is determined to ensure health for all soonest in consonance with its 13 – point development agenda, where it occupies 4<sup>th</sup> position. At the time of our visit, the government had built and equipped 120 primary health centres across the state. Its commitment to the good health of its citizens wherever they are is indisputable. One clear evidence of this is the clinic at Ginda in Nasarawa Eggon LGA. This clinic is some 25 kilometres into the bush along hardly motorable roads. It was a result of the collaboration between the MDG, the state government, the UNICEF and the community. In addition to the clinic, this project has attracted pipeborne water and light from solar energy to a community that formerly could not have dreamt of such a facility for the next quarter of a century at least. It is a best practice because local personnel were used throughout to cope with the huge technical challenges that presented themselves, thereby enhancing local capacity. Above all, it went for a paltry N7.6m. Very cost effective.



Although the state has some 55 medical doctors, 44 midwives and 1 pharmacist in its employ, it is still making efforts to beef up the number of its health personnel. For example, in January this year, it resumed work on the state's School of Nursing which construction started through direct labour in 2005 but was later abandoned.

### **EDUCATION**

It is indisputable that education is the linchpin of development in any society. Although the government is doing its best to develop this sector, it has a fairly long way to go to achieve its aims. In one of the schools visited – that is Kofar Hausa School in Keffi which offers 6 years of primary education and 3 of Junior Secondary, it was discovered that the facilities were inadequate and the teacher/pupil ratio in the secondary section is 1:63.

In Government College, Keffi, it was dilapidated structures all over the place. It was felt that old students of such an institution that has produced many great Nigerians should do better for their alma mater like Bida Old Boys are doing for theirs by erecting new structures and renovating old ones. Perhaps the education authorities should step into this, even if informally.

As for the Nasarawa State University, although Prof. Adamu Baikie, the Vice Chancellor, has done a lot to move the institution forward since he took over, there is need for internally generated revenue to lessen dependence on government and personalities.

### **ROADS**

Lots of roads are being constructed in Nasarawa state to link up the urban and rural areas with a view to easing the movement of persons and goods across and beyond the state. The total length of roads under construction is 395km at a cost of N19.98bn.

Among them are Doma to Lafia road; formerly, the stretch which passed through the Old Lafia City was impassable and after



compensating the landlords whose homes had to be demolished to make way for a wider road, the road is now being reconstructed.

There was also the challenge of robberies on this road especially on market days but with the opening up of the place, many banks have moved in and most transactions are as cashless as possible. In addition, government has intensified security patrol along the route.

Another major road under construction is the Doma – Akwata project of 50 kilometres at a cost of N2.7bn being handled in phases. Ultimately, it is expected to terminate at the Benue boundary, thus linking Nasarawa and Benue.

Above all, the Nasarawa government plans any moment from now to inaugurate a Public Works and Maintenance Agency to prevent the roads from becoming dilapidated. This certainly is a best practice.

### WATER

The Nasarawa government has done a lot to boost water supply to the inhabitants of the state to stem the outbreak of water-borne diseases. This, it has done by sinking lots of boreholes and rehabilitating existing waterworks which capacity has fallen behind demand.

An example is the Doma Waterworks which was commissioned by Abacha in 1995. It has now been found inadequate to meet the demand of the citizens. So, it is now being rehabilitated and expanded at a cost of N307m into a 3 million gallons per day regional water scheme under the auspices of the African Development Bank. While the storage capacity in Doma has been expanded by 2 million gallons, there is also a 40 kilometre pipeline network extension in Doma town. The government has also provided a 1,000KV A generator to supplement the public power supply.

This water project whose source is a tributary of Benue River needs about N4m for maintenance and as such, there are plans to install meters to earn revenue from the beneficiaries of the water scheme in order to lessen dependence on the state's exchequer.

But it was observed that there is need for capacity building by sending staff for regular training. While the senior officials benefit regularly from UNICEF training, the same cannot be said of the junior staff.

### AGRICULTURE

There is no doubt that Nasarawa is an agrarian state whose priority is the promotion of agricultural activities. As such every year since the inception of this administration, it makes it a point of duty to provide inputs such as fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides etc. to farmers to enhance their productivity. It has also purchased 80 tractors for hiring to farmers while expecting 27 more.

The government has also obtained a loan of N1bn from Oceanic Bank for distribution to small-scale, middle-scale and large-scale farmers to boost their cultivation of crops such as Cassava, Yam, Maize etc. This effort has, of course, begun to yield dividends with the export of yams abroad to earn precious foreign exchange for the state and lessening dependence on the Federation Account.

The government has also established a fertilizer blending plant whose capacity is 40 metric tonnes (about 800 bags) per hour. The sources of raw materials are Lagos, Kaduna and Port Harcourt. It is 100% owned by the state and the products are being distributed to all the local governments.

Above all like Kwara state, Nasarawa State is in Public-Private-Partnership with Zimbabwean farmers to train the youth in rudiments of commercial agriculture and establishment of huge commercial farms in the state under a scheme titled "We have opened up markets for our farmers".

Under this agric scheme, the government plans to achieve certain objectives such as

- Turning rural, subsistence farms into medium and large-scale farms through mechanization.
- Help the farms with land clearing and preparation





- Ensuring processing of farm products to add value
- Engage in land reforms by combining small parcels of farms to form large units.

With the pursuance and attainment of these objectives, Nasarawa, hopefully, may yet compete with Benue for the coveted title of “food basket of the nation”.

### **TOURISM**

Tourism is a sector very close to His Excellency, Alhaji Aliyu Akwe Doma’s heart. This is because over the years in his decades-long career, he has participated in the formulation and execution of government’s policies at state and federal levels, the former in the old Plateau State from where Nasarawa was created.

Coincidentally Nasarawa, the state over whose affairs he presides is swarming with tourist attractions. He believes that tourism is a very lucrative, foreign exchange earning industry that earns money for citizens at all levels. Money from it trickles down even to the pure water vendor, according to his adviser on tourism, hence the emphasis on it.

These attractions include the planned N25bn Farin Ruwa project which would necessitate a PPP and Akiri Warm Spring, Eggon Hills with its natural museum and Jukun shrines, and the Agabu Fishing festival.

This is potentially a multi-billion dollar industry which the state government is strongly advised to plug into.

### **STATE, LG RELATIONS**

In Nasarawa, just as in Niger, strong collaboration was noticed between the state and local governments which has enhanced development in those states. This was achieved through prompt release of money due to LGs and encouragement given to them in the execution of their various projects. This is a best practice that ought to be encouraged in all the states of the federation with its potential for rapid development of the country.

A prime example of this was found in Nasarawa LGA whose chairman is Barrister Sani Bawa. According to him, he attributes his success to the policy of the state governor who promptly releases allocation to the LGAs in the state. As such, he has virtually transformed the LG into a limited liability company.

What attracted the NGF team to the LG headquarters while passing by was the row of brand new caterpillars parked in front of the office. In an impromptu interactive session with the LG chairman, the helmsman disclosed that he took a loan from a bank to purchase 20 tractors for his tractor hiring unit. The idea is to release them on hire to farmers' cooperatives. Meanwhile, the bank has a lien on it until the loan is repaid and the tractors become the LG's property. The advantages are improved agriculture and empowerment of the farmers. He is also making arrangements with the Ministry of Agriculture for improved seedlings especially sesame which is a major crop grown in Nasarawa LGA.

In order to ease transportation problems in the LGA, he has incorporated the Nasarawa Land & Sea Limited which took a bank loan for vehicles and flying boats to service the riverine areas of the LGA. He has also modernized the local market, renovated a dilapidated building in 11 days which he converted into a guest house and an ICT centre in 9 days.

Above all, he has intensified his IGR drive. He came into office in November 2008 and started collecting allocation in December. N25,000 was generated in November 2008 when he came into power. But he immediately set up a committee to improve IGR. Above N4million have been generated so far and spent on construction of 2 health clinics, roads and tractors. He attributes the secret of his success to the governor's encouragement. This is certainly a Best Practice.

In a display of business acumen, he stressed that those companies he incorporated will be distinct from the LG and private individuals will be encouraged to subscribe to shares.