

# The Nigeria Governors' Forum From Conversation to Collaboration



## Background

The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) is a coalition of all democratically elected Governors of the country's 36 States. It was established in 1999 to provide a platform for collaboration among all Governors, irrespective of party affiliation on issues of mutual interest. Since its inception, the Forum has had six chairmen.

As set out in its Strategic Plan, its mission is to provide a common platform for collaboration among the governors on matters of public policy, to promote good governance and the sharing of good practice and to enhance cooperation at the state level and with other arms of government and society. In this way, it seeks to realise its vision to be an effective, proactive and inclusive non-partisan lobby group that fosters, promotes and sustains democratic values, good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

The NGF was formed in the knowledge that many of Nigeria's states had been created so as to pander to the whims of the country's leaders in the centre, for the most part military leaders. The states thus created were mere appendages of the centre. The many years of military rule worsened this situation, resulting in a very powerful centre dictating practically everything within the context of the federation.

It became expedient and imperative for states to assert themselves. The need to collectively and positively influence the nature and course of policies at the national level informed the philosophy behind the creation of the Forum. There was every need for states once again to assert themselves, to exercise the level of independence appropriate of credible units in a true federation, thereby removing the manifest distortion that militated against the realisation of true federalism.

After Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, a multi-party conference of all 36 democratically elected state governors was held in Abuja. The conference was organised by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a US-based organisation that provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and constitutions across the world. It was here that the Nigeria Governors'



*Caption*  
Picture caption  
to go here and  
there and here  
and there.

Forum was born, inspired by the American National Governors Association and facilitated by the NDI and the Canada-based Forum of Federations, with the then governor of Nasarawa State, Alhaji (Dr) Abdullahi Adamu, as its first chairman. There was little fanfare for the inauguration of the Forum but it turned out to be a landmark event uplifting Nigeria's federal democracy.

When Nigeria attained independence from Britain in 1960, it had only three regions. The federation moved from this initial three-region structure to a four-region structure by 1964, and it now has a 36-state structure, including 774 local governments. These changes were necessitated by the need for a balanced federation that would fairly represent all nationalities. However, they also increased imbalances in the Nigerian federation, as exemplified in the continued centralization and concentration of power at the centre with a defective federal structure made worse by many years of military rule.

In principle, the NGF was a powerful platform that would bring governors together and unite them in a common course. In reality, it failed to live up to this potential. It lacked clear direction in its early years; and although acknowledged as a useful institution, it did not have the impact on policy that it had first promised. It was more of a forum for discussion than action, and members rarely attended its meetings. Despite this, the NGF remained a powerful entity. All it required was the right leader to pull together the strands of potential into a united force for promoting good governance and federal democracy.