


# Testimonials



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**Bill Leighty**, Former Chief of Staff to Governor Mark Warner of Virginia, 2002–2006 and Governor Tim Kaine, 2006–2010 of Virginia

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**Mr Peter Obi**, Governor of Anambra State, 2006–2014, Vice Chairman, NGF and Chairman, South East Governors' Forum

On the NGF: It's been part of the nation-building and integration between the various states of Nigeria. This is part of what is lacking in Nigeria. You now see governors come together, meet together, discuss national issues, discuss on issues that bother the nation, individual states and everything. And I believe that is the way forward. And I am sure you must have known about the recent introduction of peer review. These are things that have made it look more like a country where we are together, trying to work together to face issues as a country.

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**Mallam Isa Yuguda**, CON, Governor of Bauchi State, 2007–2015

On Dr Saraki: Dr Saraki has contributed immensely to the developments and all the successes that we have recorded today as a governors' forum. Firstly, he's been very consistent and, secondly, he is very focused and very much interested in seeing through those objectives that the Forum is meant to achieve and really pursues it to a logical conclusion. He never loses steam in pursuing those objectives, he has been very consistent in calling meetings, he has also been fearless in addressing issues that affect the nation. He calls us and we intervene where it is necessary and we do that very frequently and of course this explains why he served for four years without any intervention because all of us believed in his leadership.

What you see today is an idea that has happened under his chairmanship. I was a member of a six-man delegation that attended the American Annual Governors Meeting and we learned a lot. You can see also that his leadership has attracted the attention of development partners like DFID, USAID and several other agencies to the benefit of federating states.

On the NGF: I think one of the most important achievements of course is contributing to stabilising the polity and cementing relationships between all the state governments, and that has encouraged national unity. It has served as a unifying institution for the nation.

The NGF is an institution that symbolises the unity of the country. And of course governors sit down to discuss national issues that affect not only the polity but the economy, security of the nation and how to address problems that are unique to environments. With this you can see that the institution is really very key to the development and growth of the nation.

On the future of the NGF: We are key stakeholders because we are the federating units. And if we think together, work together, we would achieve greater unity for the country and we would collapse some of these artificial barriers of language, tribe, indigeneship and non-indigeneship all these funny things about religion, culture and so on. These are the fundamental issues we need to address which are causing ripples across the country.

These are some of the critical issues; and I believe that with the governors' forum coming together and addressing them, it will serve as a unifying force for our country. I think we are forging ahead.

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**Liyel Imoke**, Governor of Cross River, 2007–2015 and Chairman, South Governors' Forum

On Dr Saraki: The NGF was a bit of an informal grouping. When he came in, he thought we should formalise the relationship, set up a secretariat; and a director general was appointed, staff was all funded. We have articulated a lot of positions for the governors, we have been able to do peer reviews, we have been able to learn from one another. The Secretariat has helped to provide information to the Forum and that has strengthened the Forum significantly.

On the NGF: The NGF is strong and vibrant and has contributed to the growth, development and stability of the country. It is a forum where you have the whole 36 governors participating. Decisions that are taken in that forum ultimately and generally have an impact on the lives of every Nigerian. We have worked hard as a team. It is one thing to have a governors' forum, it is another to have a forum as a team. So we remain a team and we work collectively under the Chairmanship of Dr Saraki, who has done creditably well in terms of elevating the status and relevance of the Forum.

We have been particularly proud of the role that we played in stabilising the polity after the passing of our late president. We have also played a key role in the constitutional amendment that led to review of electoral reform and other processes and we participated actively in ensuring that we enshrine federalism as contained in our constitution. We have also had peer-review mechanisms put in place, and that has really helped us as governors. So there is a lot of solidarity and I think a lot of the credit goes to the chairman.

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**Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, CON, Governor of Edo State, 2008–2016**

On Dr Saraki: I think one has to appreciate the leadership that Saraki has provided in the sense that the Forum started like an unstructured organisation with loose relationships. It met in hotel rooms on the basis of events and took a more ad hoc as opposed to a programmed and systematic approach in addressing issues of collaboration and cooperation. It now recognises that you need to have a secretariat that coordinates the governors and provides some administrative backup, and we are beginning to see the Secretariat evolving in research, sourcing and sharing information with governors and talking about peer-review mechanisms. Because we are colleagues, we can talk without inhibition to one another without the usual protocols and therefore have a common national attitude. So I think on the whole it has been extremely valuable. It can be time-consuming when you have something to do and you are invited to Abuja, and that takes you off your desk; but when you look at the cost-benefit analysis, I think that it has been worthwhile. The challenge is now to build on this.

On the NGF: First is to revisit the primary purpose of the Forum. Nigeria is a federal system and we have 36 states. I think Nigeria has resolved to run a federal system because we recognise the facts of our diversity and our level of cultural differences; and even the economic circumstances of various parts of the country are not exactly the same, which explains why we opted for a federal instead of a unitary system. However, we belong to one country and we have one economy. And so, even as I am the governor of one of the states, there are a couple of things that I need to learn or share with governors of other states. And learning from one another, exchanging views and ideas and reflecting together on challenges can help to enrich each other and improve in the quality of governance.

Secondly, given the challenge of building national unity, the relationship between governors and among governors can help to motivate the followership to recognise that if leaders can come together and reflect and collaborate on variety of issues, then hopefully citizens should also be inspired to see themselves as one regardless of where they reside, what they do and regardless of their religion. So for me, these things are important.

The third element is the fact that on some issues, we do relate with the federal government. It is somehow important that we have a coordinated approach so that in communicating with the federal government we have positions that reflect the average, i.e. the general thinking of the states, because the federal and the state must complement each other. The Forum offers a platform for such reflection and gives us a common voice on issues about which we need to relate and communicate effectively with federal authorities or agencies, and I think it has worked perfectly well.

On the future of the NGF: It is just to remain focused on the key issue, which is to build solidarity among and between governors and to keep focused on the great issue of development because the bottom line in all this is, how does this impact the life of the man on the street? Is he benefiting as a result of this interaction? Or are we just spending taxpayers' money and are not able to point out what we can achieve? So I think it has a future because the governors will always continue to cooperate, they will always begin to collaborate and share ideas. And the better organised the Secretariat is, the more experienced, more professional staff it has who are able to conduct research – that can help us because governance cannot be on the basis of rule of thumb. There may be things that if I have to handle them at the level of the Edo State government, it might not be cost-effective. But if we pull resources together on an issue, we can get it done. So I think it has a future but it has to remain focused. Minimum bureaucracy, more of direct action, because it is about governance.

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**Mr Babatunde Raji Fashola, SAN, Governor of Lagos State, 2007–2015**

On Dr Saraki: He has given the kind of leadership that has helped propel the Forum forward. I think he brought a lot of direction to the NGF. Before he came, things were not as organised and we only reacted to things as they happened. But during his tenure, we were able to also direct events, and that was very decisive for the country.

On the NGF: Some progress clearly has been made and I expect that more progress will be made. I think that as a body, the institution has come into its own, gradually becoming a voice of reason on many occasions in the stabilisation of our democracy and navigating also its very tricky turns and championing compromise wherever it had become necessary to do so. But by and by, I believe that as we come to dissolve the unitary nature of this federalism that we run, the nation becomes more federal in its fullest sense, physically and politically, and the authority and the impact of governors would be much more meaningful and beneficial to the people. In that sense, I think that a lot of progress has been made, and more will be made; and I expect that people will demand much more of their governors as we go along.

On the future of the NGF: Even in the future, the Forum will continue to be the stabilising force. Whenever there are national issues, our position will actually be very decisive because we are representatives of Nigeria. All the states are represented in the NGF and I think that is a major role to play in this country.

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**Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, CON, Governor of Niger State, 2007–2015 and Chairman, Northern States Governors' Forum**

On Dr Saraki: He is an excellent leader and I'm happy that we had him.

On the NGF: Since we stabilised the NGF – that was sometime in 2007 – we have seen the progress of unity of purpose, progress of oneness and indeed the concept of development because not only do we come together and discuss issues we also peer-review one another and try to learn how others have solved the problems at a much cheaper rate. So for us, the NGF has become a therapeutic venue where we come together and share information and experiences; and we advise one another and, believe me, there is no issue that has come that we have not been able to tackle.

Many people give credit to the National Assembly for so many things, but even the 'Doctrine of Necessity' started from the NGF, and then we went to the National Assembly. But it is not something we take credit for directly because we know that what we want is that things must be done in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Any community that does not respect its rules will not progress, and that is our principle. When we come together and look at the issues, we want to make sure that democracy is entrenched properly.

On the future of the NGF: I want it to become one of the best institutions in the country, an institution that will be described as entrenching democracy, an institution that has brought good governance in the country, an institution that people will have confidence in so that whatever issue you take to the Nigeria Governors' Forum will be resolved amicably.

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**Ambassador Howard Jeter, Rtd, Former US Ambassador to Nigeria**

On Dr Saraki: If you look at him, he is a model to the current generation of leaders and at his age, he has done so much for the state and for Nigeria. He is a pride and a bridge to the generational gap one would say exists and he has brought dynamism, articulation and respect to the NGF. So I think he has done the NGF proud; and for those of us who have seen what he has done, we continue to watch his leadership style with a full sense of responsibility and a call to duty. I think the NGF has benefited immensely from such a dynamic leader. And whoever is going to take over from him will have a very easy ride because he has provided a very sound framework and set a high standard given some of the successes recorded by the Forum so far.

Kudos to the organisation and skill of the outgoing chairman Dr Bukola Saraki. He is leaving a solid foundation for the NGF. It is registered with the CAC and has a secretariat. Legally it is sound; and if you see its programme function, it is bringing international best practices into it. It has invited people from the US to come and talk to governors in Nigeria about the experience of America in democracy, and so you can see that experience-sharing not only has national borders but has also got beyond Nigerian borders. I think the future is bright for the governors in Nigeria and I believe some of the things we are witnessing now are a function of the benefits that the Forum has created.

On the NGF: One has come to appreciate that the Forum has become an institution where governors are really enjoying what they do. And I believe with the kinds of symposiums, exchange visits and experience-sharing that have been done, it is going to be of immense benefit to new governors and would-be governors in future because the foundation has been laid.

They have brought to bear a unity of purpose regardless of party divide, and we are all seeing that they are bringing to Nigeria a united front so that the programmes are for the benefit of the entire people of this country irrespective of their ethnicity, religion and even political differences. I believe they have come a long way and that a unity of purpose has been translated into what we can see as development in many states because you can see that best practices are being shared. These are some of the things that you cannot quantify in terms of Naira and Kobo. But in terms of development, people in the various states will have a better deal at the end of the day.

**On the future of the NGF:** With the socialisation and the democratic culture that is becoming a norm and a strong issue in Nigeria's polity, governance and development enterprise, I believe that the future is bright, and those who have a chance to lead in any organisation, committee or state in Nigeria should know that leadership is not about an individual but about institutions. The future is bright for Africa, and Nigeria is going to lead the way.

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**Bill Leighty**, Former Chief of Staff to Governor Mark Warner of Virginia, 2002–2006 and Governor Tim Kaine, 2006–2010 of Virginia

**On Dr Saraki:** Dr Saraki has set a very strong foundation for the future of the NGF. His work will hopefully be carried on by the new chair, but he has created something that cannot be undone. Once you enable people and you give them freedom of expression and association like he has done and the freedom of ideas that they can share with each other, I do not think future governors will be able to undo that.

**On the NGF:** The role of the NGF is one of bringing together governors who would not otherwise sit down with one another. I am impressed the most with the mosaic of Nigeria, the diversity here but how everyone still sits at the table and is still willing to talk. My impression is that religious diversity is much better handled here than in the US; it is so much more polarised there. There is more respect for each other's religion here. There is also more respect between governors here.

I had an interesting thought as we were watching the discussion about the need for governors to stop being so political and move forward and put the past behind them: everyone who was lecturing the governors on that need should look at themselves and realise what they themselves are doing in their own country. Politics is a very natural thing to occur, and I'm leaving Nigeria with the sense that having looked the governors in the eye and seeing what is in their heart for their people, the states of Nigeria are in very good shape.

**On the NGF induction meeting:** It is a wonderful experience for me because I came here to impart knowledge to the governors of Nigeria but instead I'm going away with far more knowledge than I came with about the people and the mosaic of Nigeria and the strength of the heart of these governors in wanting to do well for the people of Nigeria.

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**Cynthia Eisenhower**, Government Finance Consultant, Former Chief of Staff to Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, 1999–2007 and Lt Governor Sally Pederson

**On Dr Saraki:** He is a very accomplished statesman, and it is evident in the way he communicates. It is in his relationship with people both inside and outside government. He is very open to differences of opinion, and I think those qualities are important to bring people of diverse opinions together around a common issue and reaching consensus.

**On the NGF:** Certainly the NGF has become much stronger in recent years under Dr Saraki's leadership. It has looked around the world to see where the best practices are. The NGF can bring issues of common interest together for the governors, whether it's education or communications or telecommunications. It can provide opportunities for the governors to interact and talk about problem-solving so that they can actually permit some of the best practices from around the world and accomplish things that the people expect.