

The Emergence of Dr Saraki's Chairmanship



“He brought positive, radical changes into the Forum. It became a formidable decision-maker... The NGF has done well in carrying the governors along.” *Mahmud Stankaf, Governor of Zamfara State, 2007-2011*

“A governor of governors.”

Dr (Mrs) N.N. Akambi, Ambassador, Embassy of Nigeria, The Hague, The Netherlands

All those who worked with Dr Abubakar Bukola Saraki in a professional capacity observed his qualities as a strategic thinker, astute planner, pragmatic achiever and firm but fair leader. These strengths were also clear to his fellow members of the Nigeria Governors' Forum.

It was no surprise when he sought to become Chairman of the Forum in 2007. And, more important, there was no opposition among the other governors. The transition was smooth in many ways. Dr Saraki had worked closely with Chief Lucky Igbinedion throughout his chairmanship, and being from the same party, they already enjoyed a good relationship. Also, the Forum then had very few formal rules, no effective secretariat and a minimum of processes. Dr Saraki was fully prepared and ready to initiate the plans he had for the Forum, to transform it from a passive talking shop to an active platform for driving change.

An important part of his leadership lay in inspiring his colleagues with a strong sense of belonging to the NGF and of their important role in Nigeria and its future. Their commitment to the Forum rose steeply and its meetings became well attended.

The Secretariat

Restructuring

“I felt this Forum could be used more positively and have more impact on our people, both at the state and national levels. There was a need for more resources, for the Forum to act as a foundation of knowledge and wisdom and something that could be of value to the governors.” *Dr Abubakar Bukola Saraki, Former Chairman, NGF*



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

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



As soon as Dr Saraki became Chairman, he set about reforming the NGF. Having been the governor of Kwara State since 2003, he already knew what he wanted to achieve. There had been much criticism that the Forum was about governors tussling for power and about politics and that it had nothing to do with empowering the people or developing the states or the nation. Dr Saraki recognised the need for more resources so that the Forum could convert its collective wisdom and experience into tangible actions with beneficial results for the country. And to do that, a proper secretariat had to be put in place with competent people channeling consensus through a technical and administrative division focused entirely on delivery.

As part of the Forum's resolve to ensure that the NGF Secretariat was properly institutionalized, a new management was appointed in January 2009 under the leadership of Asishana B. Okauru as Director General (DG). The recruitment of the DG was through an open and very competitive process, which first involved setting up a panel to handle recruitment, something novel to the NGF. At that point, Mr Okauru was still in the service of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). This caused consternation among the governors, as the EFCC then had cases against some governors over perceived financial recklessness. When Mr Okauru was proposed to the governors at the Forum, they took some persuading that there was no hidden agenda and that Mr Okauru was simply the most qualified candidate. The new DG's role was to be the chief executive officer, responsible for crafting policies, managing the Secretariat and being its administrative head.

Its new model followed the organisational structure of America's National Governors Association (NGA), whose members have much more input into policy matters because of their cohesiveness. To help achieve this, two departments were set up: the Research and Strategy Department and the Finance and Administration Department, each headed by two executive directors. The Executive Director of Finance and Administration's role is to provide oversight of human resources, payroll, recruitment, capacity-building and all other corporate services of the Secretariat. The Executive Director of Research and Strategy's role is to have oversight of strategy and research and policy issues. It was then decided at the top level that there was a need to define clearly the Forum's vision, mission and common purpose. Experts were brought in as staff members to deepen the Secretariat's knowledge base.



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

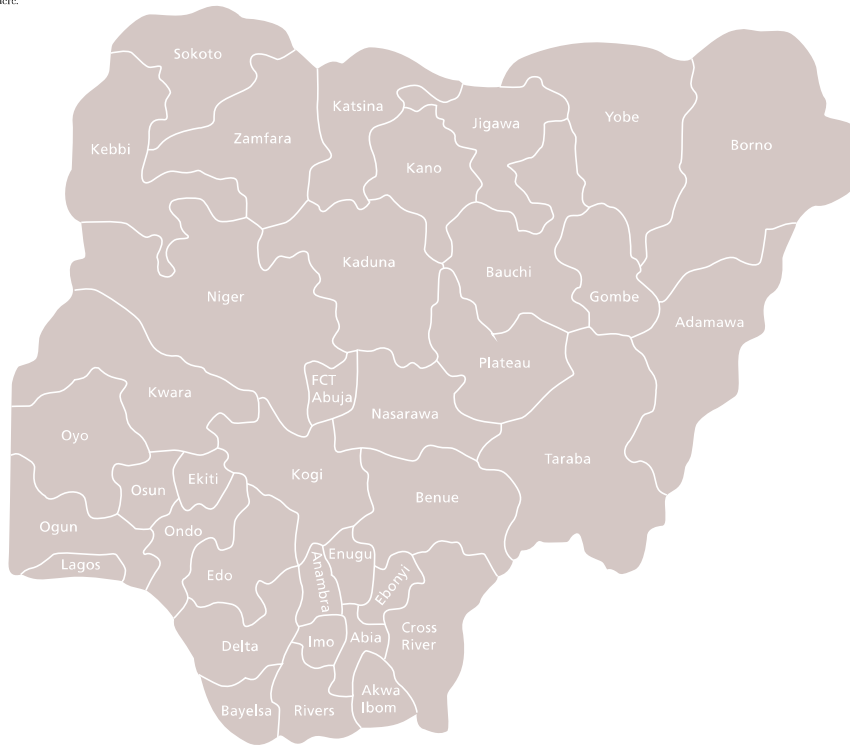
The new DG immediately identified the need for external support and pursued a strong collaboration with the NGA. In May 2009, acting on the advice of Dr Saraki, Mr Okauru initiated a programme in which the Forum delegated six of its members to visit their counterparts in the US for two weeks, a visit for sharing experience, for capacity-building and for observing first-hand the workings of a mature democracy.

This exercise kick-started a number of initiatives that fed into the Forum's policy arm. With the assistance of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and its State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) programme, technical advisory units were established in the Secretariat to deepen the support provided to state governors. These units included Policy Advisory, Knowledge Management, the State Peer Review Mechanism, Economic, and Public Financial Management.

The Secretariat also deepened its relationship with a number of stakeholders, including ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) and other international development partners.

There was as well a need to build capacity at the subnational level for the purpose of promoting good governance. This required direct training for the various key policy officers and desk officers in the states and holding workshops and conferences for the governors themselves. It was decided that officers from the various states should be brought together in order to share ideas about how planned activities could be implemented.

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



Tour of States

“Contrary to public perception, governance was indeed happening in the states.”

Mallam Mohamed Jibia, Executive Director, Finance and Administration, NGF

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



The Secretariat embarked on a comprehensive data-gathering tour of all 36 states in order to seek credible and reliable data for policymaking and for effectively connecting with its principals. The tour was also an opportunity to learn about the states and to identify and connect with the leading figures of various state organisations. Resources gathered included audio-visual materials, human resources data, project and strategy frameworks and best practice. Another outcome of the tour was a robust library of information on all states amassed by the NGF Secretariat as well as knowledge of and access to the networks of officials and institutions around the state governors.

The Secretariat concluded that development activities were taking place in the states that were not being flagged in the public domain and that it wanted them to be shared more widely. “A lot was happening in all the states that was not reported. The trip gave us an opportunity to document the findings,” commented Otunba L. O. T. Shittu, Executive Director for Strategy and Research at the NGF.

What was immediately apparent and, to some, surprising was that various states were doing a number of things very well. From infrastructure development to innovation in education, health and agriculture, giant strides were being made in socio-economic improvement. But the tour also identified challenges common to all states: unsatisfactory time management; a faulty feedback mechanism; and poor support capacity for governors.

The result of the tour was a document that collated all the findings and subsequently set the tone for the comprehensive State Peer Review Mechanism (SPRM) that the Forum adopted.