

From **Coexistence** *to* **Coordination**



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

The first Nigeria Governors' Forum retreat took place in Abuja in October 2007. Its objective was to chart a new course towards effective and accountable governance in Nigeria. As Dr Saraki observed, the retreat was carefully mapped out to respond to those issues that are critical to effective governance at the state level and for the efficient operation of Nigeria's federalism.

The first Nigeria Governors' Forum retreat took place in Abuja in October 2007. Its objective was to chart a new course towards effective and accountable governance in Nigeria. As Dr Saraki observed, the retreat was carefully mapped out to respond to those issues that are critical to effective governance at the state level and for the efficient operation of Nigeria's federalism.

It was attended by His Excellency President Umaru Yar'Adua, who declared the event open, by General Abubakar Abdusalam, who chaired the opening session, and by the governors of the 36 states. In all, 20 papers were presented by eminent Nigerians and invited dignitaries on key governance issues and the delivery of democratic dividends to the people. There were papers from the Hon. Aminu Masari, Prof. Ben Nwabuzwe, Prof. Babatunde Osotilehin, Dr Shamsudeen Usman, Dr Donald Kabaruka, Mrs Ifueko Okauru, Dr Abraham Nwankwo among others.

The retreat's resolutions were far-reaching. Two prominent ones were identified, firstly, the need for governors to restore their lost credibility, to tackle corruption and to adhere to and respect the rule of law, transparency and accountability through exemplary conduct and, secondly, the need for states to implement contributory pension schemes.

Since the first retreat, there have been several others. The Secretariat collates their recommendations and uses them to track progress in states. The retreats have addressed a number of national issues of importance to the governors, including but not limited to the minimum wage, constitutional amendments, the Excess Crude Account, subsidies and even relations and interfaces between the states themselves and between states and the federal government.

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



The Strategic Plan

The NGF had increasingly begun to play an important part in promoting good governance, improved service delivery and better coordination between all levels of government and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria.

Dr Saraki, aware of the time limitations on his chairmanship, was intent on ensuring that the work he had done in bringing the governors together and shaping them into an influential body did not fade upon his departure from office. The NGF had increasingly begun to play an important part in promoting good governance, improved service delivery and better coordination between all levels of government and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria. It therefore made sense to articulate and formalise this new role in a document that set out the shared vision of the governors and gave structure and direction for the organisation itself and a blueprint for future plans—thus the first Strategic Plan, for 2010 to 2012.

Objectives

The key objectives of the Strategic Plan include:

1. To provide a forum for governors to discuss issues of mutual/national interest and state concern, to share experiences, techniques and good practice and, where appropriate, to reach a consensus; and to present the NGF and governors' standpoint and views in discussions with federal and other institutions /organisations, both national and international;
2. To play a significant and influential role in dispute-resolution at national, state and local government levels;
3. To act as a link between state governors and governmental and non-governmental institutions on matters affecting governance and service delivery;
4. To provide a vehicle for states to work together in areas of joint or mutual interest and to support the development and implementation of coordinated solutions;
5. To develop and implement a system of peer review at the state level in order to encourage efficient and effective service delivery, improved governance and enhanced development performance; and
6. To develop an efficient and effective NGF Secretariat that is able to manage the day-to-day affairs of the NGF and to provide specific technical support in a range of areas, including:
 - *Supporting governors and their staff to develop their governance and management skills;*
 - *Developing and implementing an effective two-way communication strategy that ensures that all stakeholders are aware of the role of the NGF and the contributions it is making to national development and good governance, thereby enhancing the image of the Forum at all levels;*

- *Identifying, researching, collating and analysing data on key public policy issues and producing reports for consideration by the NGF and other stakeholders; and*
- *Providing a vehicle for debate and the dissemination of ideas and proposals on key public policy issues.*

The Strategic Plan was both a statement of intent and an acknowledgement of the milestone attained since 2007 under the chairmanship of Dr Saraki. Strategic planning has since become a regular feature of the Forum.

Ministries, Departments and Agencies

Another key role of the NGF has been to act as a link between state governors and governmental and non-governmental institutions on matters affecting governance and service delivery. Increasingly MDAs and NGOs find the NGF Secretariat an indispensable tool for interacting with the 36 governors.

The NGF also realised early on that the cascade of policy between the federal government and state governments could be facilitated better by replicating the federal institutional framework. This has been done effectively through the establishment of state debt-management offices, state bureaus of statistics and state planning commissions. The NGF, in partnership with the National Planning Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics, is driving forward the computation of the State Gross Domestic Product.

The Forum of Federations

As intimated earlier, one of the strongest partners of the NGF has been the Canada-based Forum of Federations (FoF). This partnership was amply demonstrated in its fiscal federalism training, undertaken in collaboration with the NGF and the Federal Ministry of Finance. The first instance was a two-day seminar in Abuja in 2008 on Challenges and Opportunities in Fiscal Federalism: Nigerian and International Perspectives. The event featured case studies presented by three international FoF experts, from India, South Africa and Argentina, and a case study from Nigeria, presented by Professor Akpan Ekpo.

Development Partners

Since 2009, a number of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) have been signed, including with the World Bank; DFID; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Prior to Dr Saraki's chairmanship of the Forum and the restructuring of the Secretariat, there was not a single formal partnership or relationship with any of the numerous international development agencies and institutions that operated in Nigeria. Since 2009, a number of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) have been signed, including with the World Bank; DFID; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation] (GIZ).

Benefits

The major benefits to Nigeria of the NGF's relations with its development partners include:

1. *Rolling out programmes across the 36 states through a common platform;*
2. *Communicating results and outcomes to governors directly. Previously partners would travel to the states and sign MoUs to implement certain projects. But owing to governors' incredibly busy schedules and numerous responsibilities, reaching them again would be very difficult. Partners would have contact points such as directors and commissioners of departments. Through the Forum, it became possible to reach out to the governors; and*
3. *Facilitating experience-sharing and peer-learning.*

Three of its most important strategic partners are DFID, the UNDP and UNICEF.

Department for International Development

DFID has been a great collaborator and ally of the NGF throughout its history but particularly through the SPARC programme since 2009 during Dr Saraki's time as Chairman of the Forum.

One of its greatest contributions has been its support of the State Peer Review Mechanism, for which it provided not only initial advice and funds but also facilitation of the development of benchmarks and indicators, articulation of the SPRM Base Document and formation of the steering committee. In addition, it assisted in the drawing up of the first Strategic Plan, provided expert advice on the domestication units to provide support to the governors during the restructuring of the Secretariat and helped to fund the FoF's Fiscal Federalism programme. SPARC committed itself to providing the NGF Secretariat with a full-fledged project manager and assisted it with technical aid for the provision of a knowledge-management system. This was to ensure that the NGF's stakeholders could always find first-hand information on events and activities relating to the Forum when required.

The UNDP and UNICEF

The United Nations Development Programme has partnered with the NGF since 2007 in a number of ways. Its biggest involvement has been to hold a series of seminars and workshops across the country in order to sensitise the states and other stakeholders to the UNDP's publication of the 2009 National Human Development Report (NHDR). The first in the series, the North Central leg, was held in Minna, Niger State in July 2010. Although the NGF was grateful for the efforts of the UNDP, the governors questioned the likelihood of the NHDR document actually being implemented. They suggested that the states should all be brought together through the Forum and that the roll-out of the report should be undertaken on a zonal level. They persuaded the UNDP representatives that the document needed to be explained to people from the states – how the report was prepared and what it meant – so that similar activities could be carried out internally in future. The UNDP representatives followed this advice and the country was broken down into its six zones, each of which was covered separately.