

Mimiko has Changed Face of Governance in Ondo—Akinmade

by Taiwo Adisa, Tribune.

Mr. Kayode Akinmade is the Commissioner for Information and Strategy in Ondo State. In this interview with Group Politics Editor, **Taiwo Adisa**, he insists that Governor Olusegun Mimiko has registered his name in gold in barely three years in office. Excerpts:



Kayode Akinmade

WHAT does managing information and strategic policies of a state like Ondo look like?

As someone with journalism background, you are trained to be the watchdog of the society. For one to be able to appreciate the workings of government better, it is always good to work within the system. This will further help us to appreciate the process of initiating policies and its implementation. But I am particularly happy to be working with a governor who is loved by his people. He lives with them, appreciates their problems, feels their pains and serves as the pillar whenever they feel famished or

depressed. He is a man of the people, a grass-roots politician who, through his policies, has demystified and changed the face of governance in the state for good.

Are you saying that Dr. Olusegun Mimiko has kept faith with his campaign promises in his three years in the saddle?

I can say with all sense of responsibility that Mr. Governor has kept faith with the promises he made to the people of the state when he told them at the inception of this government that he would work for them. Almost three years on, the people of the state can look back now and say they did not make a wrong choice because the governor has not deviated from his promises. Mr. Governor has worked and he is still working for the people. In fact, the passion and aspiration he has for the state will not allow him to rest on his oars. Mr. Governor has kept faith with his promises. He aspires to set a template for enduring governance in the state. Mr. Governor promised the people of the state that he was going to bridge the disconnect between them and the government. I can say with all sense of modesty that, by the grace of God, governance has been re-invented for our people, as they now perceive government in a new light.

The people have come to see their everyday concerns as the main concerns of the government. Street traders are being taken off the streets and relocated in new modern markets. Pregnant women are no longer statistics, relevant only when maternal mortality is being computed. They are now being monitored from conception to delivery.

Pregnant women in the state now deliver their babies in clean functional facilities, irrespective of their social status free of charge, and Mr. Governor has vowed that never again will pregnancy be a death sentence to women in our state. The integrated rural community programme of the government has given new relevance to folks in the rural communities where over 250 life changing programmes have been executed in collaboration with the people in the last two and half years.

Government has been able to give new hope to the unemployed youths and the government is fully poised to explore the agriculture value chain to create more sustainable jobs for the people. Our school children and education system have not been left out of government's infrastructural agenda. The mega schools being constructed across the state by Governor Mimiko were deliberately conceived and put on the ground to show that human capital development which remains key to rapid social economic development in a knowledge-driven global economy remains a priority for this government. Actually, the state's education re-engineering programme is all inclusive.

So, besides putting policies in place, what has really changed in Ondo, three years on?

We have witnessed transformation in several sectors in the state. A trip to Akure, the capital city, now will clearly confirm to you that the government's urban renewal programme is fast turning the erstwhile village outlook of the city to a true capital city of pride, worthy of a Sunshine State.

The slums and ghettos have been transformed into beautiful greenery and scenery. Ramshackle sheds and make-shifts have transformed unbelievably to 21st century neighborhood markets where our women who were formerly trading under the scorching sun now cool off under beautiful roofs, enjoying fresh air of the day while transacting their businesses.

In Akure alone, there is one neighborhood market in NEPA, another at the Afunbiowo, one in Isikan. There are other little ones within our immediate neighborhoods, while another multimillion naira market complex has sprung up yet in the NEPA area of Akure. The newly constructed Ikare regional market is now a safe haven, compared to the death-trap we had at the old market at 'Oke - Alabojuto' hill in Ikare. This market is by far the biggest, as it was designed and constructed to capture trading activities in all of Akokoland and neighbouring states. Yet another market of similar magnitude is now operational at Okitipupa.

The Caring Heart International Automart in Akure is the first of its kind in Nigeria. Others include the road dualisation projects in Akure, Ondo and Owo, as well as the beautification projects that have transformed our environments and many more under the urban renewal initiative.

There is also the age-long turbulent, chaotic Arakale road which successive administrations would not touch.. It is being dualized now as a product of constructive engagement with the people as well as prompt payment of compensations. Moreover, the Gani Fawehinmi Diagnostic Centre in Ondo is a promise fulfilled. The Olympic-size swimming pool that started 33 years ago with only 20 per cent work done by successive administrations is now completed, second only in size to the swimming pool at the Abuja National Stadium.

As a practical approach to wealth creation, food production and empowerment is now evident in Ore Farm City. Over 2,000 acres of land are under cultivation in Ore and Epe in Ondo, three water dams, 90 chalets, fully completed to house the young graduate farmers and one million oil palm seedlings imported from Malaysia to kick-start an oil palm revolution. The Auga farm centre, located in the northern senatorial district of the state, is now taking shape, having taken delivery of over a thousand cows.

A corollary to this approach is the industrial policy of Mimiko which has found resonance in the physical manifestation of Alpha 3D company, Ikare. The tomatoe paste industry in Auga, through a public- private partnership initiative, has now been resuscitated, 25 years after it had been abandoned. The story is endless.

Today, a number of projects chosen by the people have been executed by the government, from 80 quick-win high - impact projects in the first one year, rising to 230 projects across 230 communities by the turn of the second year, to 308 projects, across 308 communities in less than three years. These quick-win projects, otherwise known as confidence-building projects, came on the platform of a 3-I initiative which is Infrastructure, Institution and Industry. The infrastructural facilities provided in the 308 communities include basic health centres, town hall, block of classrooms, skill acquisition centre, solar powered borehole, mono pump, open market stalls, cassava processing industry, high court complex, rural electrification, rural feeder roads and culvert.

At last, the renaissance has begun; it is an irreversible drive to a new dawn in the sunshine state. Ondo State has, happily, become a reference point in good governance, education, health care, urban renewal, agriculture, new life for commercial activities, rebuilding of broken down infrastructure and so on.

In which sector would you say the change has been most marked?

Arguably the education sector has witnessed the most landmark transformation. Immediately the administration came on board, it elevated nine principals to the status of Tutors-General, an equivalent of the Permanent Secretary position.

Governor Mimiko also wiped away tears from the faces of our suffering unsung heroes. Some of them had regrettably died hoping for unpaid retirement benefits of 11 years or more. The governor ordered the immediate payment of outstanding pension and gratuities of retired primary school teachers and local government staff to the tune of 1.4billion naira.

Again, the mega school idea is a new deal of care for school children. Currently, there are 15 of the mega schools at various stages of completion in Akure, Ondo, Ikare, Okitipupa, Ile-Oluji and Araromi - Obu. Each of the Mega schools will accommodate no fewer than 1,000 pupils. They have been designed with provisions for computer room, music room, art-gallery, demonstration farm and sports centre among others. The intention of the concept is not for the school to be elitist but to provide level-field opportunities for all children, particularly indigent children, irrespective of parental status, for them to enjoy qualitative primary education available in any world-class institution.

Another major breakthrough initiative is the establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency. This is to standardise the quality of education, rescue the system from total collapse and reposition it for better service delivery by achieving qualitative and sustainable service delivery through the process of whole school evaluation.