

Mimiko's Three Years of Intimidating Transformation

by Bola Olufemi, Tribune.

WITH lots of projects either completed or under construction simultaneously in both the rural areas and urban centres in Ondo State, **Bola Olufemi** reports that Governor Olusegun Mimiko had set a track record of exemplary performance which without doubt, surpassed those of successive administrations since the state was created in 1976.

Governor Olusegun Mimiko's response to a question from a journalist at a news conference to mark his 100 days in office sometimes in May 2009 on whether he would be able to muster the political will required to actualize his dreams of transforming Akure from a big village to a modern city with all the facilities of a true urban centre, stunned everybody who witnessed the event.

However, despite the articulate but unambiguous description of his dreams combined with his innocence look and the seriousness with which he analyzed his vision, and how he would actualize it, probably not a single person but the governor himself, would have been convinced on the occasion that a civilian governor, with an eye for a second term, would dare thread on such a dangerous terrain.

The implication of the governor's project was that hundreds of street traders would be chased away from the main roads to give way to free flow of traffic while close to 500 buildings would be demolished to expand some roads and beautify the streets.

The project would not also spare the ubiquitous car dealers who had taken over a major portion of the Oyemekun Road, Alagbaka and Hospital Roads in Akure as there was a plan to outlaw the sale of vehicles by the roadside within the city. To effectively actualise his dream to make Akure, a real urban city centre, Mimiko would also have a rough deal with artisans as they would no longer be allowed to operate in makeshift workshops within the city, under the master plan.

Mimiko noticed that he did not convince the journalists at the forum, which was also attended by top editorial staff of some reputable print and electronic media organisations, but he kept his dream to himself and set out to work immediately. Within a year, Iroko, as he is popularly referred to by his numerous admirers and supporters within and outside the state, had successfully removed scores of streets traders from the main roads and relocated them to a much more convenient, comfortable and affordable markets which are beautifully constructed by all standard.

In less than two years, the governor had replicated the facilities, tagged; "Caring Heart

Neighborhood markets” in many parts of Akure and even built bigger types in other major towns like Okitipupa, Ondo, Ikare, and Owo among others.

Also within the period, the governor collapsed some ramshackle but dilapidated primary schools which constituted terrible eyesore within the capital city and in their place, emerged modern mega structures with up-to-date facilities, and could pass for the best private school anywhere in the country.

The expansion of the Arakale Road and the beautification of the Oba Adesida/Oyemekun Road started and many cynics who thought the project would consume the Mimiko administration, were disappointed as everybody, whose property was affected, was adequately compensated.

The state government spent up to N1bn to pay compensation to all those whose houses or shops were removed to pave the way for the expansion of Arakale road which would also accommodate bus shelters like the ones on Oba Adesida/Oyemekun Roads.

Today, the Oba Adesida and Oyemekun Roads are not only a beauty to behold, but a spectacle of all eyes at night with sparkling street lights powered by heavy generators which automatically switch on in the evenings and switch off at dawns.

Of significant importance it is to mention the fact that all automobile dealers had been successfully relocated to a unique place known as automat while the auto-technicians also had a mechanic village established for them.

Apart from his magic wand in the city centers, Mimiko’s administration had also in the last three years, executed a number of projects chosen by the people in about 308 rural communities across the state.

It started with 80 Quick- Win priority projects in the first one year, and rose to 230 projects in 230 communities in the second year and to 308 projects, across 308 communities in less than three years.

The Quick-Win projects, otherwise known as Confidence - Building projects came on the platform of a 3i initiative , that is Infrastructure, Institution and Industry. The Infrastructural facilities provided in the 308 communities include basic health centre, 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.

In the area of human capital development, Governor Olusegun Mimiko started by paying a whopping N1.4bn retirement benefits to scores of pensioners who had disengaged from service between 1999 and 2010 as either local government employees or as teachers. The gesture was also extended to various organised market groups and traders associations

when the state's micro-credit agency gave out over N2bn as soft loans to hundreds of farmers, traders and artisans to support their businesses to make them financially independent.

Obviously disturbed by the embarrassing rates of graduates unemployment in the state, the Mimiko administration, also established very large modern farm villages in each of the three senatorial districts of the state. They are located in Auga-Akoko (Ondo North), Ore (Ondo South) and Epe (Ondo central).

Accommodation with necessary facilities was provided in each of the modern villages for all the graduate farmers who are expected to be trained in the modern technique of farming. Apart from the monthly stipend they were paid, proceeds from the farms of the young farmers would be bought at competitive market prices by the state government in order to encourage them after each harvest.

Worried by the declining standard of education in the country with Ondo state not an exemption, the governor established the Quality Assurance Agency. The agency was expected to standardise the quality of education, and rescue the system from total collapse. It will also reposition it for better service delivery by achieving qualitative and sustainable service delivery through the process of whole school evaluation.

The Mimiko administration, determined to tackle the disturbing maternal mortality rate in the country and Ondo state in particular, introduced the Abiye, a code name for an all round revolution in the health care delivery targeting mothers and babies.

This initiative has been applauded beyond the shores of Nigeria. The World Bank even described it as an innovation to be adopted by other African nations if indeed the intractable problem of infant and maternal mortality prevalent in Africa must be tackled. Abiye is a Yoruba word for safe motherhood which could also pass for a prayer. Under the programme, the pregnant woman, right from the day she is registered at any of the government hospitals, is attached to a team of medical personnel and doctor for close monitoring.

She is given a mobile phone on the bill of the state government, which would enable her to seek and receive consistent and constant medical attention anywhere, even in the remotest part of the state without buying air time on her phone.

The innovation had allowed Mimiko to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of improving maternal and infant health by tracking the four major killers: severe bleeding, infections, hypertensive disorders and obstructed labor.

A comprehensive tertiary specialist hospital known as 'the Mother and Child Hospital' was also established to serve as referral centre for complicated cases involving child health and delivery.

The hospital, cited in Akure and was already being replicated in other major towns in the state, specifically offers specialized medical care, including complicated surgeries at no cost to the patients.

It is on record that the hospital had taken delivery of about 2, 000 babies in the last two years of its establishment.

The civil servants were also not left out in the scheme of things as the administration apart from ensuring regular payments of their salaries and allowances, had also renovated and reconstructed the various office complexes at the state secretariat to provide a conducive environment for them to operate.