



Promoting friendship & understanding
through financial support for Nigerian education

The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust

Patron : Sir Mervyn Brown, KCMG, OBE

2 Vincent Street
LONDON SW1P 4LD

Telephone : 020 7828 5588

E-mail : education@britain-nigeria.org

CONFIDENTIAL

NIGERIA DIGEST – March 2010

The main news from Nigeria since the publication of the December *Nigeria Digest* concerns the health of President Yar'Adua, his treatment for his illness in Saudi Arabia and his unexpected return to Nigeria on 24th February. This subject is dealt with in detail in this edition of the *Digest*.

There have been many developments in the education sector and the attention of members is particularly drawn to this edition's second article with details of the Federal Government 'roadmap' for the sector.

□ Education Update

The Guardian Newspaper in Nigeria published a very comprehensive, interesting and with rare understanding, review of the education sector in 2009. This is reproduced in full below: -

"The appointment of Dr Sam Egwu as Education Minister was greeted with some caution by stakeholders, who were already weary of the crises rocking the sector. But Egwu raised the stakes with the unveiling of the roadmap, which was widely touted as the remedy to the seemingly unending problems.

Although it was not the first time that the Education Ministry had come up with an impressive document, Egwu had pledged that this time the contents would be implemented to the letter. Stakeholders were even invited to examine the document, which was anchored by Professor Godswill Obioma, the Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC).

But, the Minister had inherited several problems that he was clearly unprepared to deal with. Suddenly, more problems began to emerge. There were, on the one hand, the teachers of the Federal Unity Schools who embarked on a strike over several issues ranging from fears that the schools might be sold to the refusal of the Federal Government to reinstate the junior classes chopped due to the Universal Basic Education Law.

Then, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) went on strike too, over traditional issues, which had been lingering since 1992. There was, again, a strike by the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) which felt cheated by what its members described as Federal Government's preference to always grant ASUU's requests. On top of that, members of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) were also up in arms over the 27.5% salary increment, which the Governors' Forum had earlier agreed to implement but which had been slow in coming.

The Minister was understandably confused. Attention shifted from the implementation of the roadmap to the management of the several crises that had erupted. Regrettably, the approach adopted by the Education Ministry only fuelled the crises the more. The Ministry made uncomplimentary statements about the NUT demands to the effect that it was not the business of the Federal Government to negotiate with its representatives. That infuriated the NUT executives. And for ASUU, the conflicting signals from both the Minister and Dr Gamaniel Onosode who headed the Federal Government's team over whether the Ministry could negotiate with the union, sent the university teachers back to the trenches. To that extent, the implementation framework for the Basic, Post Basic and Tertiary levels earlier earmarked to commence in the last six months of this year, could not go on as scheduled. The Minister could also not attend critical international conferences abroad because of the multiple crises at home. At the UNESCO General Conference for instance, it was Hajia Aishatu Dukku, the Minister of State that attended and presented a copy of the roadmap to the world organisation.

The various crises greatly undermined the credibility of the Ministry and portrayed it as an agency incapable of dealing with crises. When it became clear to the Presidency that the Ministry could not handle the ASUU problem, Edo State Governor, Adams Oshiomhole was called in the assist. The former Nigeria Labour

Congress (NLC) leader's intervention eventually diffused tension and paved the way for an amicable resolution.

Luckily, many State Governments also began to negotiate with the NUT where promises were made. States that agreed to pay the Teachers' Salary Scale (TSS) had the strike called off, while teachers refused to resume work in States that refused to pay. As for SSANU, its members went as far as declaring fasting and prayers for God "to soften the heart of the Federal Government" towards resolving their plight. Their prayers were eventually answered."

➤ **How UBEC discovered fake FTS participants.**

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) made a discovery of 3,248 fake participants in the Federal Teachers' Scheme (FTS) this year. It also spent sometime enlightening the various States on how to access the Federal Government's contribution to the UBE scheme. But the report about the scandalous fraud discovered in the FST showed that the College of Education Hong, Adamawa State, had the highest number of fake teachers, numbering 410, followed by College of Education Akamkpa. Cross River, which had 386 and Federal College of Education Obudu, also in Cross River State, had a total of 211 fake participants. The Federal Government had established the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS) in 2006 with the primary aim of addressing the shortfall in teacher supply to basic institutions as well as exploring employment opportunities to NCE graduates. This was expected to serve as a period of internship, preparatory to the participants' formal absorption into the teaching profession.

Participants for the scheme were recruited and posted to teach in public primary schools and junior secondary schools across States of the Federation and Federal Capital Territory. The first set of participants had completed two years service in October 2008 and to ensure that only qualified teachers participate in the programme, the Commission, with the co-operation of colleges of education and polytechnics, had carried out a certificate verification exercise for the second set of participants currently on the scheme.

On the need for States to access their funds, the UBEC board led by its Executive Secretary, Dr Ahmed Mohammed embarked on advocacy campaigns to States. The commission had been worried that an accumulation of about N53 billion Naira was still lying in the Central Bank unclaimed. The UBEC Board suggested that since Governors were in direct control of the budgets in their respective States, they were in the best position to ensure that the counterpart funds were contributed. The Commission had also embarked on the sensitisation exercise to clear some misconceptions by some State Governments who were not very comfortable with the conditions and measures put in place by the Federal Government.

However, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission also arrested some top officials of the Commission over contract awards that ran into millions. Those arrested were relieved of their jobs and the Commission's management had to quickly clarify issues following the outcry that greeted the arrests. The case is still being prosecuted.

➤ **ETF's Plethora of Assignments**

This year was a very busy one for the Education Trust Fund (ETF), which also faced its own fair share of challenges. The responsibility to actualise most of the Federal Government's plans for the tertiary education sub sector rested on its shoulders. First, Education Minister Dr Sam Egwu had announced early in the year that special grants totalling N47 billion had been set aside by the Federal Government for six universities, three polytechnics, three colleges of education and the Nigeria Defence academy to turn them into world class institutions. The ETF would not only disburse the funds, it must also monitor how the funds will be utilised. This required the parastatal to put various committees of competent academics and professions together, to visit each of the beneficiaries and examine what the funds are to be used for, in line with the Government's guidelines. Dr. Hafiz Abubakar, for instance, led the delegation that visited the Yaba College of Technology to examine the projects that the institution wanted to expend the money on.

But there was another major assignment the ETF had to handle simultaneously. It had to come up with a strategy on how best to disburse the N2 billion Book Development Fund, which was meant to revive and encourage the production and consumption of academic texts in tertiary institutions across the country. For that reason, the ETF invited 36 professors, who met severally and came up with a blueprint on the way forward.

However, the ETF is still in a quandary about what happened to the huge sums of money that it granted some Federal Government colleges in the six geo-political zones. About N50 million was given to six unity schools, each for infrastructure development and other things. But it has since been discovered that some contractors collected money and simply disappeared, while some did a shoddy job. A few, however, did a good job.

The Minister of State for Education, Hajia Dukku, who was alarmed when she could not get the appropriate records from the Federal Ministry of Education to track the funds, had to embark on the verification of projects purportedly executed. She was shocked when she visited a unity school in the Federal Capital Territory, where she discovered over 10 abandoned projects, for which money had been partly paid. She was so angry that she threatened to publish the names of the defaulting contractors. Nigerians are anxiously waiting for her to fulfil her promise.

➤ **For ASUU, 2009 is best year ever**

Perhaps, this year could safely be described as the best for the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), owing to two major victories it achieved simultaneously. But the victories came with a high price.

First, after repeated strikes and bitter quarrels, the union finally got the Federal Government to sign the agreement that had been lingering since 2001. Although the union did not get all that it wanted, it got most of it, especially with regard to remuneration, conditions of service and university administration. Now academics are to earn more, and the retirement age has been shifted from 65 to 70. If all goes well, the first beneficiary of that victory could be the current Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Prof. Toll Odugbemi who had reached the age of 65, but is yet to complete his term. He is relying on the provision of the new agreement to sail through.

But the sweetest victory of all is the Supreme Court's recent judgement, which shattered the wickedness of the University of Ilorin's management unleashed on the sacked 49 lecturers. The teachers had been relieved of their jobs over their participation in the 2001 national ASUU strike, in total disregard for university norms. They were not given a fair hearing and the contents of their letters of dismissal were scandalous. Various attempts by stakeholders to resolve the matter were rebuffed by the UNILORIN management.

First, the National Universities Commission's (NUC) directive, issued when Prof. Peter Okebukola was its Executive Secretary was disregarded. The written directive by Prof. Babatola Borishade as Education Minister to UNILORIN, that the teachers be reabsorbed was also disregarded. The Federal Government's special committee, headed by the respectable Prof Ayo Banjo, which also recommended that the sacking of the teachers was wrong, was equally ignored. In fact, when Banjo was eventually appointed Chairman of the same UNILORIN governing council, his attempt to correct the blunder was fiercely resisted by familiar forces.

Other attempts by all education ministers after Borishade to resolve the matter also proved abortive. Unfortunately, former President Olusegun Obasanjo also turned a blind eye to logical arguments provided by major stakeholders, and preferred, instead, to listen to the governing council of the University, headed by General Salihu Ibrahim (Rtd), which peddled a lot of lies at that time. Instead of towing the path of honour, the University introduced various dirty dimensions into the crisis.

Frustrated, ASUU fought the battle on two fronts; it regularly embarked on strikes, which earned it bitter criticisms from the public, and it also went to court. The union got the first victory at the lower court, which was however reversed by the Appeal Court. The Supreme Court eventually affirmed that the judgement of the lower court, the High Court was right. Although two of the teachers are dead, the others have now become richer because all their salary arrears from the time they were sacked will now be paid.

□ **Education – The Future**

In the light of the difficulties endured by the education sector in 2009, the Minister of Education, Dr Sam Egwu has produced a 16-page roadmap for future development in the sector. A summary of this was reported in an article in *This Day*, which said: -

“This year the Federal Ministry of Education will continue with the implementation of the Roadmap for the sector by paying special attention to improving access to quality basic and secondary education.

The Roadmap for the Education sector, prepared by the Ministry and approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) last year, has four priority areas. Access and Equity, Standards and Quality Assurance, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and funding.

Among others, the Ministry of Education will mount a special nation-wide Federal Government Intervention, Skills Updating programme for teachers of English and Mathematics in secondary schools to address the problems of poor performance in the senior school certificate examination (SSCE).

It also plans to reposition tertiary education to be globally competitive and improve quality, access and standards of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). These were part of the submissions

of the Minister, Dr Sam Egwu at the Ministry's annual press briefing chaired by the Minister of Information and Communication, Prof Dora Akunyili in Abuja recently.

Egwu told his large audience, which included the Head of Service Mr Steve Oronsaye, Minister of State for Education Hajiya Dukku, the Permanent Secretary Prof Oladapo Afolabi, heads of parastatals and representatives of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, that the ministry was providing frameworks through its many initiatives to engender the active involvement and participation of all stakeholders in education policy and programme development, implementation and monitoring.

Management audit of all the departments and agencies has been introduced to address institutional capacity to ensure service delivery and a culture of excellence in the achievement of its statutory mandates. But how did the ministry and its 22 parastatals fair last year? In a 16 page presentation that lasted hours, the Minister dwelt on their achievements and challenges.

Last year's Federal Government budget for education was N224 billion of which N40 billion was for recurrent expenditure and N184 billion for capital projects. Egwu said the ministry had so far recorded an 85% performance, the highest in the last 10 years. He also expressed optimism that the ministry would exceed 90% performance by the end of the fiscal year next month.

The Minister stressed that since education is on the concurrent list, which makes it a shared responsibility of Federal, State and local governments, a lot rests on the shoulders of State and local governments which are primarily responsible for basic and secondary education. Low enrolment in basic and secondary education, as well as transition from junior to senior secondary school, remain a major challenge.

According to him, the Federal Government formulates policy and gives direction in its implementation, but will continue to make special intervention and provide models of best practice at all levels.

At the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) level for example, he said the Federal Government, in collaboration with UNICEF, opened a model ECCDS Resource Centre and Crèche in Abuja recently. This, Egwu said, is to ensure the implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood Development policy.

The partners had earlier conducted a study on capacity gaps assessment for early child development in in-service/pre-service teacher development nation-wide. The study highlighted the challenge of inadequate numbers of educators with required qualifications at the ECCE in the country. An online ECD programme for lecturers in colleges of education has therefore commenced at the Virtual University, Victoria, Canada. It is being sponsored by the World Bank and co-ordinated by UNICEF.

At the basic education level, the Minister said the Federal Government intervenes through the Federal Teachers' Scheme (FTS) where holders of the National Certificate in Education (NCE) are recruited to serve in the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

States are expected to augment their N10,000 monthly allowance, paid by the Federal Government, and also retain them after the yearlong service, so as to gradually replace the number of unqualified teachers in the system. Out of the first set of the 40,000 participants in the FTS, Egwu said 25,068 were confirmed for permanent employment in 27 States. A second set of 34,000 participants was recently recruited across the country.

Another initiative is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Intervention Funds, which many States fail to access due to the requirement of a counterpart fund of the same amount as their allocation. About N40 billion accruing to many of the States is yet to be accessed.

To address low performance of pupils in the core competencies of numeracy, literacy and life skills, the Ministry procured and distributed 7,9062,812 copies of recommended textbooks in English Language, Mathematics, Science-based activity text books for Primary 4, at the cost of N4.287 billion. Junior secondary schools in the 36 States and the FCT also got 494,875 copies of 107 library titles. Egwu said plans were underway for the procurement and distribution of English Language, Mathematics, Science-based activity textbooks for primary 5 and assorted titles of library books for JSS, using the 2009 UBE Intervention Fund for instructional materials.

For secondary education, there are now 106 unity colleges in the country, with the establishment of two Federal Science and Technical Colleges in Dayi, Katsina State and Doma, Nasarawa State, last year.

The Minister said the colleges deserve a model of what schools at that level should be. But, it is a known fact that virtually all of them are a shadow of what they ought to be. To address this, he said, the ministry resolved to decentralise procurement. So, rather than award all their contracts from Abuja as the practice

was, the principals, working with the School Based Management Committees (SBMC) have now been empowered to award and be held accountable for the execution of the contracts.

On teachers, Egwu said if he had his way, teachers would be the highest paid in the country, earning more than even politicians do. Even though he is also a politician, he said, this was the desirable thing to do if the country must get its priorities right.

According to him it would be better if politicians were paid only allowances and not salaries. "People think that politics is the quickest way to make money, but very soon, politics will no longer be attractive". His optimism was hinged on the planned move to improve teachers' pay, once their professional registration is complete. He disclosed that the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) had so far registered 730,000 teachers, 45,000 of them last year alone. The production of their certificates started in August last year. Those in Adamawa, Niger and Gombe States had remitted their subscriptions and would soon receive their valid professional licences, the Minister said.

One of the sub-sectors that has made the country proud, Egwu said, is the Nigerian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The curriculum developed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) has been described as a model for other African countries to adopt. According to him, TVET remains one of the success stories of UNESCO's interventions in the country. For the first time, NBTE has developed 346 e-books targeted at the new TVE curricula to address the dearth of books in the sub-sector.

Last year, the ministry approved the establishment of 30 private sector-owned Innovation, Enterprises Institutions (IEIs) and three Vocational Enterprises Institutions (VEIs) as alternative routes to higher education. Provisional approvals were also given to 59 other IEIs and VEIs. New disciplines, including plumbing and pipefitting, mechatronics, furniture-making and upholstery, cosmetology and beauty therapy, printing technology, security technology and management, banking operation techniques, marine engineering technology, shipping management and motor vehicle mechanics were developed for the IEIs and VEIs.

Sadly, there is still an aversion to TVET as it is seen as an inferior sub-sector. Egwu however drew attention to the importance that middle-level manpower to economic development, adding that professionals in that sector earn far more than the so-called university graduates and are more often than not, job creators as against seekers. This is why the sub-sector is one of the key focus areas of the roadmap.

The National Mathematical Centre (NMC) and Nigerian Educational Research and Development Centre (NERDC) also made their marks last year. NMCF introduced its own postgraduate programme, at MSc and Ph.D. levels in the mathematical sciences, in collaboration with six Nigerian universities.

Through this, courses that were non-existent in any Nigerian university are now being offered. The courses and collaborating institutions are: mathematics in biomedicine (University of Jos); mathematical modelling and simulation of engineering systems, as well as mathematical ecology (Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi), on technology in mathematical modelling in maritime technology (Federal University of Technology, Owerri); information and communication technology in mathematics education (University of Ilorin); information and communication theory (Opbafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) and financial mathematics programme (University of Abuja).

As a follow-up to the nine-year basic education curriculum, including 3000 sign languages for learners with special needs, NERDC, among others, has also developed Teachers' Handbook for this curriculum; curricula in 40 subjects for senior secondary schools, 34 entrepreneurial trades curricula, also for senior secondary school, draft curricula for Efik, Fulfulde and Tiv languages; as well as a toy making and caregivers' manual in 13 Nigerian languages.

At the tertiary level, six Federal universities, the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), 3 Federal polytechnics and colleges of education, across the six geo-political zones of the country were selected as centres of excellence and given special grants of a total of N40 billion, through the Education Trust Fund (ETF), for the construction and equipping of zonal central teaching and research laboratories, programme update and general improvement of the teaching and learning environment.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) last year licensed three State universities in Kwara, Sokoto and Ekiti, as well as seven private universities in different parts of the country. The Commission undertook accreditation visits to 850 programmes in 548 institutions and re-visits to some MBA programmes. It also concluded work on the production of Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for all

postgraduate programmes in Nigerian universities. Fourteen illegal universities were also closed down between 2007 and last year.

In conclusion Egwu said the ministry craved the continued support, co-operation and collaboration of all stakeholders in the task of quality education provision at all levels.

Akunyili congratulated him, saying the interaction was an eye-opener. She took particular note of the roadmap for the education sector, describing it as a first of its kind. The decentralisation of procurement in unity colleges, she said, was also worthy of commendation.”

□ **Federal Government Budget 2010.**

Whilst the 2010 Federal Government budget has been approved by the House of Representatives, it has not, at the time of writing this article, been cleared by the Senate. As a result of which there are no detailed plans of the capital expenditure budget for education known yet but this will be rectified by the time the next edition of the *Digest* is produced.

Several State Governments have, however, had their 2010 budgets approved by their Houses of Assembly including Akwa, Ibom, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Plateau and Yobe and education has been allocated the largest share of their individual budgets. As examples, in Borno, from a total budget of N85.1 billion, education receives the largest allocation of N13.8 billion and the State Governor, Ali Sheriff has said that the State Ministry of Education has been charged with the responsibility of proper planning, formulation, co-ordination and monitoring of primary, post-primary schools and tertiary institutions in the State. In Gombe State, the Governor Danjuma Goje has said “that priority would be accorded the education sector to cover the three senatorial districts of the State noting that in 2009 his administration was able to build 400 classrooms in selected schools across the State”. He said that 200 more classrooms would be constructed and 400 dilapidated classrooms were earmarked for renovation and would be furnished while in Jigawa State, from a total budget of N71 billion, education receives the largest allocation, accounting for 25% of the total.

□ **President Yar’Adua**

On 23rd November 2009, President Yar’Adua who had been diagnosed as suffering from Acute Pericarditis, travelled to Saudi Arabia for treatment for the condition. He was admitted to the King Faisal Hospital in Jeddah, and since then there has been a virtual news blackout on his condition and treatment both by the hospital and the government in Nigeria. A delegation of Northern State Governors travelled to Jeddah in December to see the President but was unable to see him due to his doctor’s advice “because of the risk of infection”. Access to see the President was restricted to his wife, Turai, his Chief Security officer, his ADC and the Nigerian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Aminchi. The latter used to be the Deputy Governor of Katsina State. This has led to conjecture that the President had undergone a procedure for his illness or, if appropriate, the underlying cause. Subsequent attempted visits by the PDP Chairman with senior members of the ruling party and a delegation in 2010 from the House of Representatives were also unable to see the President for the same reason. However, they were given a full briefing on the President’s health by his wife.

On 12th January 2010 the President, sounding extremely weak, to the point where some people had difficulty in identifying his voice, made a radio broadcast on the BBC to the people of Nigeria saying that he was recovering from his illness and hoped to be able to return to Nigeria soon. This broadcast was to have a significant development on subsequent events in Nigeria.

Under Section 145 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution it states that “whenever the President is proceeding on medical vacation or is otherwise unable to discharge the functions of his office he shall transmit a written declaration to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives to that effect and until he transmit to them a written declaration to the contrary, then the Vice President shall perform the functions of the President as Acting President”. Although it is widely rumoured that the President did write the necessary letters, they were never received and there is only one person in the cabinet who would have had the power to overrule this. From early January onwards there were increasing demands from eminent Nigerians and both Chambers of the National Assembly for him to sign such a letter, but there was no response from the President. Subsequently the National Assembly passed legislation to avoid this problem in the future.

On 9th February 2010 in what has universally been called a controversial interpretation of Section 145, the National Assembly voted to declare that Goodluck Jonathon should become Acting President taking as its authority the President’s radio broadcast when he declared that he was ill. Already there are at least two court cases that have sought to declare that the vote was illegal.

It is notable that this led to some of President Yar'Adua's 'inner circle' to leave Nigeria, the most notable of which was James Ibori who is now in Dubai. He used to be the Governor of Delta State and at one time was facing criminal charges instigated by the EFCC at the Federal High Court in Lagos. Inexplicably these charges were withdrawn. His wife, however, is currently on trial in London.

On 17th February 2010 the Federal Executive Council resolved to send a six-man delegation to see the President and consider his health in terms of Section 144 of the Constitution. The delegation arrived in Saudi Arabia on 23rd February with a letter signed by the Acting President addressed to King Abdullah expressing Nigeria's gratitude for President Yar'Adua's treatment and generous hospitality. The letter was delivered to the Saudi Arabian Minister for Foreign Affairs and it was only after the meeting that the delegation was informed by the Nigerian Ambassador that President Yar'Adua had been discharged from hospital and had already started his return journey to Nigeria. As a result the delegation returned home to Nigeria on the following day

According to press reports, at the instigation of President Yar'Adua, the Acting President had been receiving regular medical reports about the President's health from his doctors in Saudi Arabia sent by the Nigerian Ambassador while the President was in hospital but these apparently were not disclosed to either the FEC or the National Assembly.

The FEC, through its delegation were seeking to remove the President from office under the terms of Section 144 of the Constitution. However, following the unsuccessful visit of its delegation the 36 State Governors intervened and made it quite clear that it would not support such a move. The ministers were reminded that it was the 36 State Governors who nominated them in the first place and that it was President Yar'Adua who appointed them

Section 144 of the Constitution states "That the President or Vice President shall cease to hold office if a) by a resolution passed by two thirds majority of all the members of the Executive Council of the Federation it is declared that the President or Vice President is incapable of discharging the functions of his office and b) the declaration is verified after such medical examination as may be necessary by a medical panel established under subsection (4) in its report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives then the President or Vice President shall cease to hold office as from the date of the medical report.

President Yar'Adua arrived in Abuja in the very early hours of the morning to be met with unprecedented security both at the airport and in the city. He was driven straight to the Presidential villa and has not been seen in public since. He has, though, issued a statement recognising the Acting President and that he is to continue to govern the Country whilst the President recuperates from his illness. Access to the President remains strictly controlled and Turai will brief the Acting President about the President's health on a daily basis.

Since his appointment Goodluck Jonathon has made several moves to consolidate his position and at his first cabinet moved the Attorney General from his position and appointed him Minister for Special Duties. He has though stated his priorities which include the fight against corruption, the urgent necessity to address the Niger Delta amnesty programme and the need to urgently resolve the problems in the power sector.

One of the Acting President's first actions was to create The Presidential Advisory Council, consisting of 25 eminent Nigerians to promote good governance in the power, security and infrastructure sectors as well as investigating the electoral process and fight against corruption. However this was not welcomed by the State Governors as detailed in an article in *Business Day* on the 8th March, which said:

"The appointment of a 25-member Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan without first consulting the Governors is the major reason why the Governors' Forum frustrated Jonathan's acquisition of real power. At the meeting held at the Acting President's residence, last Tuesday, ahead of last weeks Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting, the Governors' Forum had delivered to Jonathan a number of orders that effectively changed his status from a hopeful substantive president to a lame duck Acting President to Yar'Adua."

During a fiery meeting, according to an online news agency, the Governors accused Jonathan of selecting men and women who are "paperweight" in their various States. Above all, they said Jonathan overreached himself by appointing such a powerful committee with a northern Christian and southern Christian as chairman and deputy chairman of PAC. They also asked Jonathan to shelve the plan to invoke Section 144 of the Constitution at last Wednesday's FEC meeting, insisting that Yar'Adua should continue as President while Jonathan should remain "acting president."

The Governors' move to checkmate Jonathan has been described as an "expedient volte-face driven by greed and avarice." A few weeks ago, the same State Governors boosted Jonathan's path to presidential power when they met and decided that Yar'Adua's prolonged absence from Nigeria was overheating the system. The leader of the group, Bukola Saraki, was particularly miffed that he was rebuffed when he visited Saudi Arabia a few days after Yar'Adua was evacuated from Nigeria on medical emergency. On his return to Nigeria, Saraki used his Father to push a series of campaigns against Yar'Adua through his "Northern Union" pressure group.

Seeing an opportunity for his own political advancement Bukola Saraki, it was alleged, reached out to Jonathan to ask for the position of vice president. He promised that once Jonathan offered him the position, he would activate his contacts in the National Assembly to impeach Yar'Adua after declaring him incapacitated. Sources said that Jonathan declined to designate Bukola Saraki as the vice president.

Despite this setback the Acting President took decisive action on the 17th March when he sacked his entire cabinet without any explanation. There would appear to be two main reasons for this move, which received the prior approval of the PDP's National Chairman. Firstly to inject new impetus into the cabinet and remove under-performing Ministers and secondly to move against Ministers who were strong and close supporters of President Yar'Adua. The latter were part of what had become known as the "Kitchen Cabinet" which met regularly with Turai. This has instantly reduced her power and left the President vulnerable again, once a new cabinet is appointed, to moves against him under Section 144.

It is expected that as many as 50% of the former cabinet will be re-appointed, although not necessarily to their former portfolio's and the next step is for the State Governors to recommend the names of two people from their State to The Acting President for his consideration as potential new Ministers. It is only when the Acting President has made his choice that the names can be submitted to the Senate for its consideration and approval.

The Acting President's tenure of office is likely to be short lived as the Senate has already commenced consideration of an amendment to the Constitution to bring the Presidential elections forward from INEC's proposed dates of either January or April 2011 to a date of not more than 240 days before the new President assumes office. In reality this would mean that the elections could be held as early as November this year and there is an agreement in place which should allow the National Assembly to approve this amendment to the Constitution within the next few weeks. It then requires the approval of not less than two thirds of the State Houses of Assembly to become enshrined into law.

The Acting President has also established an 18-man Presidential Projects Assessment Committee to probe contracts awarded by the Government that he believes were inflated, abandoned or have not even been started. Clearly the Committee will need to pay particular attention to the Federal Executive Council who were responsible for awarding contracts originally. The Committee, which has to present its report within 3 months, is to be chaired by Ibrahim Bunu who has previously been Minister for the Federal Capital Territory. The Presidential Monitoring Committee of the Niger Delta Development Commission has also been reconstituted and the 10-man committee is to oversee effective and easier management of the NDDC.

At the time of going to press, President Yar'Adua has not been seen or heard of since his return to Nigeria which urgently needs to be rectified whilst the Acting President has not been able to see him either, despite many attempts to do so. He has said that he will not request any meetings in the future but will wait to be summoned by him.

□ **The Presidential Elections**

It is generally accepted that President Yar'Adua will not seek re-election meaning that the ruling People's Democratic Party will need to select a new candidate which is not going to be easy. The State Governors are proposing that the party holds its convention in May or June and as the PDP has a presidential zoning policy it needs to find a candidate from the North who is prepared to serve only one term of four years. This unfortunately eliminates the Acting President who comes from the South East.

The short tenure of office rules out a number of potential candidates but the names currently being mentioned both in Nigeria and London include Dr Bukola Saraki (Kwara), who is seen as one of the leading candidates, Isa Yaguda (Bauchi), Ibrahim Sheema (Katsina) and the new National Security Adviser Lt Gen (Ret'd) Aliyu Mohammed Gusau who it is widely believed has been endorsed by former President Obasanjo as his preferred candidate. At the age of 69 Aliyu Gusau is the right age to be a one term President. He has considerable experience of Government having served in a similar position for ex-President Obasanjo from 1999-2006 and is widely respected by both the military and internationally. At the very least he is a strong contender. President Yar'Adua was handpicked by the former President as his nominee and it will be very interesting to learn of his own preferred candidate in due course who will be a very strong contender.

Other names that are discussed are Dr Abba Ruba, the current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Alhaji Adamu Aliero.

David Mark the President of the Senate wields a great deal of power and is closely aligned to Ibrahim Babangida. Although the latter has authority within the PDP his influence is not as strong as it was but their alliance together is strong. The candidate they decide to support will also have to be watched closely.

It was very interesting to note that Johnnie Carson, the USA Assistant Secretary of State, declined an invitation to meet Goodluck Jonathon recently. Instead he had an hour long meeting with Ibrahim Babangida at his home in Minna which is extremely intriguing.

The two-time Presidential losing candidate Muhammadu Buhari, who previously represented the ANPP, has joined forces with former vice president Atiku Abubakar, the former Governor of Lagos State Bola Tinubu, and the former Sokoto State Governor Attahiru Bafarawa to join a newly merged party created from the Action for Congress and the National Democratic Movement to fight the next elections.

There is so much speculation and it will be extremely interesting to closely study developments, which will be reported on in future editions of the *Digest*.

□ **Other Nigerian News**

➤ **Religious Riots in Jos**

Sadly it is necessary to again write about religious riots in Jos, which originally occurred in January and then there were retaliatory incidents at the beginning of March.

In January hundreds of people were murdered between groups of Christian and Muslim youths as rioting occurred over a week with major damage caused the churches and houses. The State Governor imposed a 24-hour curfew but this was ineffective and led to the then Vice President, Goodluck Jonathon to deploy troops in Jos. The 3rd Armoured Brigade, based in Jos, began an immediate deploy of troops who were supported by reinforcements from Bauchi and Kaduna and order was eventually restored. The Vice President addressed the country, by radio, to condemn the riots and resulting deaths. A committee, under the Chairmanship of Chief Solomon Lar was established to provide ways of permanently resolving the recurring crisis in Jos. Following a meeting with the Vice President, Governor Jang said that the total death toll was over 500.

Barely a month after the Solomon Lar committee began its work, fresh riots broke out in Jos resulting in over 400 people being killed by alleged Hausa Fulani militants who also burnt down houses. Again troops had to be deployed to quell the situation

➤ **Central Bank of Nigeria**

As at 5th March, Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves stood at US\$41.5 billion of which there is only US\$2 billion left in the excess crude account. The latter must be seen to needing an investigation as the world oil price is in excess of US\$80 which should mean that the excess crude account should be substantially higher.

➤ **Foreign Exchange Rates**

According to the latest statistics the Naira was quoted at N148.31 = US\$1 and against the pound the rate is N223.02 = GBP1

➤ **The Niger Delta Amnesty**

With the absence of President Yar'Adua the amnesty programme has stalled and in January the funds promised to former militants were exhausted. Fortunately the passage of the Supplementary Budget, which had to be taken to Jeddah for the President to sign, overcame this problem. Having said that, it is quite clear that the Government badly underestimated the number of militants who would accept the amnesty and even now they are still being registered. The amnesty programme will be seen as the greatest achievement by President Yar'Adua and quite possibly the most notable for decades in Nigeria.

Circulated March 23, 2010

The content of this publication has been prepared by a Nigeria Correspondent for The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust and whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of the information, the Trust cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omission. It is recommended Members seek further advice before basing decisions upon the detail given in this Digest