

THE ORJI KALU 6 YAERS IN ABIA STATE

Abia State, conceptualized by our founding fathers as God's own state was created alongside its contemporaries on August 27th 1991 by the then military government of President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida.

The Political Bureau Committee that recommended the creation of states saw the need to create Abia State in the interest of fairness and equity.

Late Dr. Michael Okpara and other protagonists who in the early 80's started the agitation for the creation of Abia State did so not only because of its economic viability but also to ensure justice and fairness. Notwithstanding the need to ensure the spread of development to several parts of the Old Imo State that was neglected, the creation was seen as politically imperative in order to ensure that the Igbos, particularly Abians are fully re-integrated into the Nigerian political scene, thereby ending the profound sense of frustration and alienation as a result of the aftermath of the civil war.

Since all sections of the state worked together for the creation of the state, the founding fathers adopted the motto "Onye Aghala Nwanneya" meaning "none should abandon his brother", embodying the blueprint, philosophy and guiding principle of the affairs of the state particularly in the area of provision of social amenities and appointments.

However, the inauguration of the Orji Uzor Kalu administration on May 29, 1999 marked the dawn of a new beginning in Abia State, popularly referred to as God's Own State. Governor Orji Uzor Kalu, a tested hand who has contributed immensely to the development of the private sector of the Nigerian economy brought his wealth of experience and international connection to chart a new course for the state that was held hostage in the past by inept leadership.

His first term as the Executive Governor of the State witnessed unprecedented development in all areas. Today there is a visible presence of democracy dividends, such as good roads, electricity, water, rehabilitated schools and health facilities, qualitative free and functional education, increased agricultural production, poverty eradication, security of life and property, quality housing, regular payment of salaries, payment of arrears of pension and gratuity and better working condition for civil servants among others.

The state achieved all these things with little resources at its disposal. At his inaugural speech for a second term, Dr Kalu promised to consolidate on these achievements, pointing out that the ultimate aim of his administration was to

transform the state into an economically vibrant state and satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the Abia people.

The alienation that hitherto existed between the government and people has disappeared. Dr Kalu has used welfarist programmes to give every part of the state a sense of belonging. Abians have started to speak of possibilities and the future is no longer as distant as it used to be.

Below is an attempt to chronicle the achievements of the administration in various sectors of governance within the past five years.

VISION FOR A NEW ABIA STATE

Since coming into political limelight, Dr. Kalu has established himself as one of the moving forces of the struggle for a just society and the establishment of an egalitarian society based on justice and fairness. His commitment to purposeful leadership no doubt helped him to invoke alchemy of a great vision that has made his followers more committed to the struggle for a change and his opponents more determined to pull him down.

Despite political vicissitudes and challenges to his political philosophy to change the status quo, Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu has been undaunted. He is never wavering in the cause for which he has staked his life, and never flinching on the job as a person aspiring to serve his people. His love for moderation and his astute commitment to the cause of national unity has earned him the admiration of Nigerians across ethnic barriers and partisan politics. He believes that the enormous challenges of development of Nigeria calls for creativity and resourcefulness in generating a change in the well being of the people.

He is a political leader who has a grasp of developmental logic, who understands what it takes to achieve real and sustained growth, a leader who is people-oriented, who recognizes people as an asset and involves them in changing their own lot and a leader who sees politics as an opportunity to serve and not to be served. Dr. Kalu's wealth of experience is an inestimable leadership asset.

His life history depicts a man destined to excel in life and provide purposeful leadership in all his endeavours. His life has been guided by the realization that an individual can attain greatness and personal fulfillment through

determination, hardwork and a good sense of self-worth as well as firm focus on one's mission.

His political blueprint and agenda for a new Abia State presents a crisp and clear manner of Dr. Kalu's thoughts and prescriptions for lasting multi-sectoral reforms, towards the emergence of a self-reliant 21st century Abia State. Orji Kalu's life is characterized by public spiritedness and honesty. The government and the people of Nigeria have since recognized this quality. He has been honoured locally and internationally in recognition of his meritorious services to the country and mankind. His is acknowledged as a friend of everybody in distress. His extra-ordinary compassion and genuine love for the suffering masses has elevated his humanitarian work beyond the mere offering of material succour through scholarships and donations to individuals and groups. He has challenged Nigerians to define our humanity through love, service and selflessness. This is an attribute that a man that wants to be a national leader should possess, which has endeared him to the masses.

ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT

Abia State economy like the economy of other States of the Federation was distressed before the inauguration of the civilian administration in May, 1999. The Orji Uzor Kalu administration inherited a prostrate economy characterized by declining capacity utilization in the real sector, poor performance of major infrastructural facilities, unsustainable liquidity position arising from unemployment and inflation. The state met an empty treasury and inherited a debt of N98 billion.

The Abia State Governor Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, an astute businessman with years of contact with the public and private sectors of the economy came up with an economic blueprint to put the distressed economy on the path of sustainable growth.

The state made deliberate efforts to solicit the support of diverse economic actors and interest groups in the state. The state government, in order to ensure continuity, set up an economic reconstruction committee that critically appraised the economic policies of past administrations with a view to fine-tuning some of them to meet the current economic realities. The government consolidated and improved on some of the economic policies of the past, in appreciation of the fact that the general well being of the citizenry makes for social harmony, political stability, economic growth and overall progress of the state.

PROVISION OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Government has consistently embarked on road rehabilitation since it came into office. Government has also succeeded in providing massive infrastructural facilities all over the state. The road network that was in deplorable state before the governor came into power has been given facelifts. The government has constructed over 600 roads in both urban and rural areas.

Except for the federal roads, governor Kalu has fulfilled his promise of rehabilitating a substantial number of roads in the state. In pursuance of the state government policy of rural transformation, the government has supplied 490 transformers and provided 600 boreholes to rural communities in the state.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

In the same vein, government is mobilizing resources for a massive sensitization of the citizenry on the needs to engage in small and medium scale enterprises. At the tail end of 2003, the Aba Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ACCIMA) staged a Made – In – Aba trade fair. A Small and Medium Scale industries sensitization workshop was also held.

Government plans to consolidate upon the successes recorded in both events to enhance rapid industrialization, sustainable economic development poverty eradication and employment generation. Already, the state has launched her Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (SMEDFUND). An initiative that sees Government contributing one percent of her annual budget to SME development and also, incorporate the private sector in the development of the sector.

PRIVATE SECTOR ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE

Governor Orji Kalu's economic policies are directed firstly at limiting government direct participation in economic activities in favour of increased private sector involvement, with the government providing necessary incentives and support services to facilitate the growth of the economy.

Secondly, the blueprint is also aimed at strengthening government machinery and agencies involved in support service delivery to Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME). To this effect, the government has in recent years embarked on capacity building and strengthening of major institutions involved in industrialisation.

The pursuit of industrial investment and strengthening of the state economic and productive base is expected to bring the desired change and orientation that is consistent with the demands of the technology-driven 21st century. The target is essentially to create an economy that will grow at the rate of 10 percent per annum, generate employment for the burgeoning labour force and adapt to the forces of globalization.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR BUSINESS

Consequently, the government has created an enabling environment for the sustenance of business in the state. For example, the government has rehabilitated the decaying infrastructure, provided an appropriate legal framework to aid efficiency in business activities, efficient civil service structure with qualified technocrats for regular monitoring and fine-tuning of policies, adequate security of lives and property and above all, transparency in every sphere of governance.

In addition, the Kalu administration ensures prompt allocation of plots in government industrial estates to the would-be investors as well as a favourable land use policy which facilitates easy access to land.

The state Ministry of Solid Minerals in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has compiled an in-depth survey of mineral and investment potentials of various communities in the state. The rich mineral deposit in the state like limestone, gypsum, lead, zinc, petroleum and cash crops such as palm oil, cashew, nuts, coffee, cocoa, rubber and palm kernel are ready for tapping by interested investors.

KALU'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AND DRIVE FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Governor Kalu has embarked on economic diplomacy in some parts of the world in order to use his international business contact to get direct foreign investment in the state. The shuttle diplomacy has yielded fruits today as there has been remarkable inflow of foreign direct investment into the state.

The Abia Chief Executive had in the past, during his visits abroad, impressed upon the World Bank, International Finance Institutions and indeed, investors, to come to Abia and explore the State's numerous economic potentials. This lobby has paid off as the Bretton Woods officials not long ago, visited Abia State on a fact-finding mission.

The then World Bank President, Mr. James Wolfhenson, who led other bank officials and foreign investors to Aba in March 2004 commended the quality of Aba-made-goods and described Abia State as an investment haven.

In October 2004, a consortium of American investors chose Abia State for building a N14.5 billion ultra-modern Teaching Hospital. Guinness Nigeria Plc recently opened its N4 billion plant in Aba which goes to show the success story of Governor Kalu's policy of encouraging local and foreign investments. In addition, a consortium of German investors has begun building a N10.5 billion Dairy Factory at Obuaku City in furtherance of Government efforts to encourage foreign direct investment to the state. Many other multinationals have also invested in the state.

The Ministry of Commerce and industry is dotted with registers of would-be investors from various economic desks of various embassies. No week passes without an Ambassador of one country or the other embarking on an exploratory tour of the state. Ditto Federal Government Ministries and Agencies.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture, the proven mainstay of the livelihood of the majority of rural dwellers and indeed, those in the urban area has been allocated unparalleled attention. Like Dr. Okpara did, but on a larger scale, Dr. Orji Kalu has instituted one of the most enduring agricultural policies anywhere in Nigeria. His annual distribution of the latest internationally modified seedlings of various crop to farmers speak volumes of his determination to make Abia state compare favorably in world agricultural ratings.

Consequently, 700 hectares of Cassava farm intercropped with several thousand Palm seedlings has been cultivated. In addition, a standard fishery hatchery is being constructed at the Ogwe Chicken Farms and 10,000 disease – resistant Banana and Pineapple seedlings are being distributed to farmers at affordable prices. The State Government is also distributing 2.5 million pineapple suckers, 505 hectares of rubber and 6 million palm, cocoa and cashew seedlings to farmers in the state for this years planting season. This is apart from distribution of 5 million day-old chicks to farmers, civil servants, churches, cooperative societies, schools and individuals in the state.

All this is in realization of the need to restore Agriculture as the mainstay of the nation's economy; the Abia State Government has accorded agriculture a priority attention. Without being immodest, the Orji Kalu administration has equaled and in some cases surpassed the impressive record set by the Michael Okpara administration in the agricultural sector.

EDUCATION

One area where Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu has distinguished himself as a leader with vision is the educational sector. Conscious of the liberating quality of education, his administration has pursued a free education policy in both primary and secondary schools. The state government has renovated over 800 schools, providing computers, exercise books, desks, mathematical sets and free transport services for pupils and students in the state.

HEALTH

A look at projects being executed in the health sector show that already, contracts have been awarded for the renovation of all the General Hospitals in Abia State. The contracts, which were awarded shortly after the inauguration of the second term of Dr. Orji Kalu, will be completed in April 2005. Already, up – to – date and state – of – the – art medical equipment have been purchased by the state government awaiting the completion of renovation work before being fully installed in all the General Hospitals.

The free medical care scheme of the Orji Kalu administration has so far treated over 2 million people. The scheme has brought both local and international recognition to the Abia State Government. The World Bank in collaboration with the Opportunities Industrialisation Centres (O.I.C) recently bestowed on Governor Kalu the prestigious Leon H. Sullivan Award with the free medical scheme listed as one of the factors that brought the governor the award.

The government in recognition of the need to give qualitative medical service to the people have embarked on the completion of Specialist Hospitals in the state which is expected to cost over N3.5 billion.

The Abia State University Teaching Hospital has equally been renovated and upgraded to international standard. This is in addition to an ultra modern N14.5 billion Teaching Hospital being built by a consortium of American investors.

The World Bank has also selected Abia State as a beneficiary State for its Health System Development Grant. The money Abia state stands to benefit from the grant is well over N200 Million.

TRANSPORT

The transport sector has already begun to feel the pulse of the new order. A fortnight ago, 6 brand new 46 – seater Mercedes Benz Buses were added to the fleet of cars of the Abia State Transport Corporation. The purchase of the buses was in fulfillment of an earlier promise made by the Governor to beef up the fleet of the corporation.

Arrangement has also been concluded to introduce a transport system that will minimize the difficulties faced by Abians living in the various housing estates in commuting to various parts of the town.

HOUSING

In the Housing sector, having succeeded in reducing to a great extent, the accommodation problem faced by Abians via the construction of the Ehimiri Housing Estate under phase one, the government is to focus on the vigorous pursuit of the phase two of her housing blueprint. This phase will witness the realization of the Obuaku City Project, the Amauba Housing Estate for legislators and civil servants and an ultra modern Housing Estate in Aba.

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

One area that the state has excelled is in the area of sports. Enyimba Football Club that was on the verge of relegation was brought back to prominence by the Orji Uzor Kalu visionary leadership, which sees sports as means of promoting national unity and image both in Nigeria and Africa.

Today, Enyimba Football Club has won the CAF champions league and the CAF Supercup for two consecutive years. The State government has given the necessary support and encouragement to the team to achieve this feat. The team has also won the Nigeria league for three consecutive times.

It is not only in football that the state has invested heavily in sports promotion. The state handball team, the Valiants are currently the commonwealth champions. One of the strategies adopted by the government in sports promotion has been the provision of sports facilities to ensure Abia Sports men, women and others alike have reasonable opportunity to develop their skills and have confidence in competitive game.

The state government has upgraded the Aba and Umuahia Stadia. Specifically, the Aba stadium has been upgraded to an international standard

and has been approved by CAF for Enyimba Football Club CAF matches. The CAF President, Alhaji Issa Hayatou who inspected the stadium and gave the endorsement was impressed with facilities put in place for crowd control and management and security of players.

PROBITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE

The present Abia State Government of Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, since its inception in 1999 has brought a novel dimension to the concept of Transparency and Accountability in Governance.

At the inception of his administration, Dr. Orji Kalu signified his intention to make the policy of Probity, Transparency and Accountability (PTA) the tripod upon which all Government economic, political and socio-cultural decisions will rest.

In furtherance of this effort, he immediately put in motion a novel policy of publishing in all National Newspapers and Magazines, the Statement of Account of Abia State on a quarterly basis.

Apart from the print media, the Monthly Statements of Account are also accessible on the Abia State website. This means that even those who are not in the Country can view the Account books of Abia State on the Internet.

PRESTIGIOUS LEON SULLIVAN AWARD

It is therefore not surprising that the United States of America based Opportunities Industrialization Centre (O.I.C) in conjunction with the World Bank chose Governor Orji Uzor Kalu as the first Nigerian governor to receive its prestigious Rev. Leon H. Sullivan award for leadership.

The organization was undoubtedly convinced that a State Government that chooses to conduct its businesses so openly in brazen contrast to the larger society where Nigeria occupies the Number 2 position in the Transparency International world Corruption rating deserves commendation. By this award, Governor Kalu becomes the third African to be so honoured by the World Bank. The previous two recipients are former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria.

FOR ORJI KALU'S TOMMORROW, HE GIVES TODAY

Despite dwindling financial capabilities of the state brought about by heavy deductions from federal allocations due to the state as repayment of foreign loans incurred by the Mbakwe administration of the Old Imo State, the Abia

State Government has prudently managed the state resources to reposition the State as the fastest growing State economy in the country.

Governor Kalu operates an open door administration. The task the administration has set before itself is therefore to consolidate on the gains of the past five years, strengthen the confidence of our people and fully instill a vigorous momentum in the state psyche. Needless to mention that upholding discipline and the regeneration of economic and social institution has been upheld as the watchword for the new tenure.

Even when the Federal Government has failed to release Abia State's N3 billion bond which has met all legal requirements, the good people of Abia State have not given up hope. The enterprising spirit of our people remains unparalleled.

With little federal presence, Abia State has emerged a shining example of a people's unflinching determination to take their destiny into their own hands. We know that with our commitment to remaining number one in the federation, our present predicament will nourish the fruits for a greater tomorrow.

Dr. Orji Kalu has all it takes to serve Nigeria and Nigerians faithfully. It takes clarity of vision, a deep understanding of development dynamics, fervent desire to create change and a human centred consciousness to spew forth the profound ideas that enables a man excel in leadership. The core message in his political blueprint is that meaningful and sustained socio-economic growth can be achieved by a leader who is purposeful, well equipped, truly people-oriented, broad minded and God fearing. Orji Kalu has all these qualities, and that is why he has made the difference in Abia State.