



**TWO YEARS OF
GOV. SAMUEL ORTOM:**

**THE APOSTLE OF
CHANGE IN
BENUE STATE**



VISION FOR A NEW BENUE

Thanks to a change of political preference, for the first time since 1999, Benue state has witnessed social and infrastructural development like it has never witnessed before, a clear proof of the effective leadership that Governor Ortom has shown since the inception of his administration. The achievements that the Ortom government has recorded in its two years in office can only be fully appreciated when compared with what had existed under previous governments. At the time the Governor Ortom administration took over the governance of Benue State, the situation they met on ground was signposted by so many negative indices. There was poor security

of lives and property in Benue State. Government business was sluggish. Corruption and brazen embezzlement of funds was so obvious. Government of Benue literally became a sea of political appointees with over 500 Special/Senior Special Assistants, 30 Advisers, 17 Commissioners together with a litany of praise singers. The biggest challenge the government inherited was insecurity. In Primary schools, teachers were on strike for about one year just as the quality of education nose-dived because teachers were on strike at all levels of the educational system and there was general labour unrest. State Schools of Nursing and Midwifery as well as College of Health Technology, Agasha were closed. Benue State University (BSU) was closed. Students who elected to study medicine

were stuck for 12 years because government never provided funds to facilitate the accreditation of Benue State University Medical School. Civil Servants were depressed. Agriculture in Benue also suffered before the inception of the Governor Ortom administration. Production was stunted as the quality and quantity of Agric inputs including Fertilizer was compromised through corrupt practices. Farmers deserted their farms into refugee camps as a result of herdsmen/farmers crisis and both government and the traditional institutions had no clue as to what to do. Farmers were hungry, angry and frustrated as there was no policy in place to address the crises. Most of the International Development Agencies had left Benue because they could not enjoy

the co-operation of government. Contract awards were inflated, and not completed and businessmen were owed billions of naira. Government had questionable bank loans, over drafts and bonds. Stocks owned by government were sold and proceeds put into private use by top government officials.

The Governor Ortom administration's response for repositioning Benue State was carefully encapsulated in their Blueprint titled: "Our Collective Vision for a New Benue". As Governor Ortom pointed out, this Blueprint has been their compass for effectively dealing with the

challenges of governance in Benue State. Their work has been guided by five strategic areas, namely:

- Provision of Good Governance anchored on the fear of God
- Agriculture driven Industrialization with a passion
- Provision of Critical Infrastructure to facilitate development
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) based Education/Health Services
- Promotion of Gender Equality, women, children, youth and

people with disability.

With the new government in place, immediate steps were taken to address these issues and to change the way things had been done before.

As Governor Ortom marks his second year in office, evidence of his government's efforts to implement the necessary development initiatives that would turn the state around are visible in every sector. The successes recorded so far cover all the five strategic areas in the government's blueprint, prepared based on the complaints and demands of the people.

AGRICULTURE

Development of the Agriculture sector has been a priority for the Ortom government. Governor Ortom used the occasion of the 2017 Democracy Day celebration to flag off the 2017 Cropping Season and the sale of Fertilizer to the people of the state. The 2017 Cropping Season, Fertilizer Sales and Distribution programme is meant to generate bumper harvests in Benue State.

Benue has increased its productive capacity in agriculture in the last two years because of various incentives.

- The state now has several Small Processing Industries scattered across the three Senatorial Zones. Several Rice, Yam, Cassava and Food Processing Companies have emerged in the last two years as a result of the conducive environment we have created.
- The government is working conscientiously to supply quality farm inputs on time and at highly subsidized rates to Benue farmers
- The state is up-to-date in the payment of Counterpart Funds for Fadama III Additional Financing, as well as IFAD Rice and Cassava Value Chain Development programmes. The aim of this is to support farmers in terms of direct finance, good agricultural practices and transfer of improved agricultural technologies.
- In the same vein, the government has provided funds for the mobilization, sensitization and training of farmers to participate in CBN's Anchor Borrowers' Programme. This has increased rice production and expanded the employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. It also created wealth for both rice millers and farmers in the State.
- The State Executive Council



Gov. Ortom leading by example

approved the procurement of 7,500 metric tons of assorted brands of inorganic fertilizers and 5,000 litres of liquid plant health promoters for supply to Benue farmers at affordable prices for the 2017 cropping season. The Fertilizer Blending plant has also been revamped to boost supplies".

- These farm inputs would be delivered to farmers directly by the vendors engaged by the state government under the strict supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



Subsidized Fertilizers ready for distribution

The farmers are to pay their share of the cost of the respective inputs as redeemed to the vendors, while the state government is to pay the subsidy component of the inputs redeemed by the farmers to the vendor after diligent reconciliation and certification by the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

OPEN GRAZING PROHIBITION LAW 2017

The government has also focused a lot of attention towards the resolution of the perennial crisis between farmers and herdsmen in Benue state – as in many other states of the Federation.

Even as the crises between farmers and herdsmen explode into orgies of violence between farmers and herdsmen, the Governor Ortom administration in Benue State has refused to be helpless.

- The Benue state government came out boldly to canvass for the adoption of a holistic, rational approach in resolving the crises between farmers and herdsmen. Using various fora and media to convey its views, both nationally and internationally, the Benue State Government called on Nigeria to adopt Ranching as an

international best practice in cattle rearing – as it is done in Africa and other continents.

- As a practical demonstration of the courage of its convictions, the Benue state government went further to become one of the first few states in Nigeria to pass a law prohibiting open grazing in its domain. Those who fall foul of Benue state's Prohibition of Open Grazing Law risk long jail terms and hefty fines.
- Governor Ortom has explained lucidly that “the Prohibition of Open Grazing Law 2017 is not intended to send herdsmen away. Herdsmen can freely live in Benue



provided their livestock are ranched. Prohibition of Open Grazing is not only for Fulanis. All persons including Benue citizens who have livestock must have them ranched or they will most certainly face a five year jail term or N1 million fine as provided in the Law.”

HEALTH

Before the advent of the administration of Governor Ortom, health institutions in Benue state were in a mess. The Schools of Nursing and Midwifery as well as the College of Health Technology, Agasha, had lost their accreditations for several years, due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of qualified, professional staff. Consequently, these health institutions could no longer admit students.

- Not anymore. Within the first six months of his administration, Governor Ortom rehabilitated, re-equipped and re-staffed these health institutions to the acceptable standards – which enabled them to regain their accreditations.
- More than 40 Primary Health Care Centres have been built.
- Governor Ortom's critical interventions and achievements in the health sector not only secured accreditation for those key health institutions in the state, but also



Refurbished School of Nursing and Midwifery

led to the resumption of academic activities at the schools of Nursing and Midwifery in Makurdi, the state capital.

- Other notable achievements of the Ortom administration in the health sector include the construction of 42 Health Care Centres.

- The government procured and supplied ambulances and essential drugs and executed various water and sanitation projects in 31 communities across the state. More than 500 water projects were also executed across the length and breadth of the state.

EDUCATION

- In the critical field of Education, Governor Ortom's achievements in the last two years include giving a facelift to numerous schools across the state – through a comprehensive programme of renovation, rehabilitation and restructuring of moribund and dilapidated educational institutions in various parts of the state.
- Altogether, the government under

Governor Ortom has executed more than 740 Primary School projects. On the other hand, the state government is closing down illegal schools that hitherto existed in various parts of the state.

- The Benue State University (BSU) also received full accreditation – with the full support and funding of the Ortom administration. This made the graduation of 152 medical doctors from BSU possible.
- The School of Nursing and Midwifery has been renovated and



accredited with resumption of academic activities after admission of Students.



CARGO-POLIS AIRPORT



Ground breaking ceremony of the airport site



Governor Ortom recently performed the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of the N38 billion Cargopolis Airport in Makurdi, the state capital.

§ The government is executing the landmark project, with a consortium of private corporations, under the Public

Private Partnership (PPP). The project, which is expected to be completed in 2020, will generate hundreds of jobs and create wealth and opportunities at minimum cost to the state government.

§ This project would place Benue on the aviation map of the world,

make it the hub for West Africa, improve transportation and transform the host rural community.

§ Other benefits include establishment of industries in the vicinity, provision of capacity

building in several areas including training of pilots and aviation engineers as well as hosting of aviation tank farm and power plant. On completion, the airport will offer both cargo and passenger transport services.

PEACE AND SECURITY

One of the major areas in which the administration of Governor Ortom has changed the landscape of Benue state in the last two years is in the delicate area of the maintenance of peace and security – one of the key responsibilities of any government.

Critical areas of achievement of the Ortom administration:

- The government has passed laws like the Prohibition of Open Grazing of Livestock; the Prohibition of Abduction, Kidnapping, Hostage-taking, and Secret Cults Law, 2017
- The government has submitted more than 12 Executive Bills to

strengthen the security of citizens – and five have already been passed by the State House of Assembly

- The government has mobilized the Armed Forces, the Police, State Security Services and the Civil Defence Corps to all flash points in the State to maintain peace and security
- Benue state is now one of the most peaceful states in the country as citizens go about freely without molestation.



Surrendered arms

AMNESTY PROGRAMME

▪ The government, under Governor Ortom, has successfully executed an Amnesty programme that ushered in peace and tranquillity to Benue state. The programme called on youths to surrender their weapons. These illegal weapons were destroyed in accordance with United Nations requirements. Over 900 youths surrendered and are being rehabilitated to take up new livelihoods.

▪ On May 29, 2017, Governor Ortom granted amnesty to 43 convicts to mark the 2017 Democracy Day. He explained that the amnesty was in the exercise of his constitutional powers on the recommendation of the Advisory Council on the Prerogative of Mercy.



EMPOWERMENT OF YOUTHS AND WOMEN

One of the well-known cardinal objectives of the Ortom administration is the empowerment of Youth and Women – as critical forces of socio-economic development. In this regard, and taking into account the fact that the modern age is the era of the information technology revolution, which naturally has a mass appeal to the youth, the Ortom administration established the Benue Information Technology Development Agency (BITDA).

- The government also began evaluating the designation and use of Internet enabled Parks in Makurdi, the state capital and other places. This would get the

youth population of the state using computers and the Internet to run their businesses, advertising their wares and interacting freely with their counterparts. These actions would take many youths off the streets and get them to be involved in more productive economic activities.

- The Ortom administration has also outlawed youth begging in Benue state, and restored hope to the youth through opportunities for Skills Acquisition and Income Generation. These skills acquisition and income generation



Benue Youth

activities are facilitated by agencies of government like the Sustainable Development Initiatives, which have the Skills on the Wheel Programme, in addition to three Entrepreneurship Development Centres in Ado, Guma and Makurdi.



Gov. Ortom with Chinese delegates

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

- The Governor Ortom administration has gone a long way to enhance Development Cooperation with the international development agencies and multinational organizations. Indeed, International Development Agencies that left Benue state are coming back to the state.
- Many of these international development agencies are now ready to work with the government while many others are already working with the State Government to support social and economic development of the State.
- The International Development Agencies include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which is helping greatly in the state's agricultural sector; the World Bank; the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA); the UK Department for International Development (DFID); the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Mercy Corps and several other bilateral and multi-lateral agencies.

REFORMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CHIEFTAINCY AFFAIRS

- The Ortom administration has taken steps to affirm and demonstrate its belief in the need to institute democracy at the grassroots level in the state. While some state governments have delayed conducting local government elections until they are very sure of favourable outcomes that would enthrone their cronies, the Ortom administration had no desire whatsoever to truncate the local government polls.
- Governor Ortom endorsed that the local government elections be held in June 2017 – giving Benue indigenes the opportunity to go to the polls to elect local government chairmen and councillors of their choice. Indeed, Governor Ortom strived to mobilize the Benue people to ensure that they went out en mass to exercise their franchise and elect local government chairpersons and councillors of their choice.
- The Ortom administration also extended its reforms to Chieftaincy affairs in the state. The administration initiated an executive bill which led to the amended Chieftaincy Law that has been used in the appointment of Traditional Rulers across Benue state. The government supervised the free and fair appointment and installation of the Tiv Paramount Ruler, The Tor Tiv, as well as First Class and Third Class Chiefs across the state.
- In fact, the Ortom administration has received the commendations of Benue citizens and non-indigenes alike for the peaceful and transparent appointment of traditional rulers in the state. Unlike the unwholesome practices of chieftaincy selections in the past, which were riddled with influence-peddling and graft, Benue communities now choose their own leaders – without fear or favour.
- Unlike in the past when some



Gov. Ortom addressing the chiefs



Cross Section of Benue Chiefs

traditional rulers in the state tended to dabble into political matters, traditional rulers are now apolitical.

- In Benue state now, the involvement of any traditional ruler at all levels in politics is prohibited – and sanctions await offenders. The respected Royal fathers are now fully committed to their

ascribed roles as fathers of the state and custodians of the culture and tradition of the people.



**TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN
GOVERNANCE**

- The Change administration of Governor Ortom has also ushered in an era of Transparency and Good Governance in Benue State. The Ortom administration listened to the people and their demand for transparency and accountability in governance.
- This led to the setting up of the Justice Elizabeth Kpojime Commission – which remains one of the remarkable events of the Ortom administration. The Justice Kpojime Commission is casting the searchlight on various aspects of governance during the previous administrations in the state, in order to unravel what went wrong in the past, and recommend how to right the wrongs to prevent a recurrence in the future.
- Unlike in the past, the state government now have a small and effective government composed of the cream of Benue people with a good blend of young and older experienced people.
- For instance, the state

government now has about 100 Assistants, rather than 500 as in some previous administrations in the state; 20 Advisers, rather than 30; and 13 Commissioners in the state's Cabinet – rather than 17.

- In this era of transparency and accountability, the state government's relationship with the organized labour unions has changed for good. They have all relevant information on the activities of government, including full knowledge of funds that come in and how they are disbursed.
- As a result of its commitment to the welfare of workers, Governor Ortom's administration declared a state of emergency on salary payments. The state of emergency on salaries was declared when the government found that its resources were unable to pay more than six months of salary arrears to State and Local Government employees – as well as pensioners.
- The declaration of a state of emergency on salary means that the government concentrated its resources, energies and efforts to clear the salary arrears and

pensions of its workforce. The State Government, therefore, had to look for creative ways to pay salaries and pensions.

- The emergency meant also that the state government had to fish out ghost workers and eliminate fraud in the system.
- Benue state was the only state in the country where there were some civil servants who were fraudulently earning salaries that were higher than the salaries of the Governor and his Deputy.
- The Ortom administration detected the crafty transfer of potential retirees to tertiary institutions, in order to gain additional five years, without the persons having lecturing experience. There were cases of promotions based on unauthorized certificates, abuse of allowances, and of course the thousands of ghost workers, mainstreaming and scheduling payment of double Salaries etc.

Overall, within two years of coming into office, the Ortom administration in Benue state has made many remarkable achievements in transforming the state – and left its footprints in the sands of time. Besides laws and policies, the government has many visible achievements that are tangible.