



**FIRST ANNIVERSARY BROADCAST BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE
GOVERNOR OF CROSS RIVER STATE, SENATOR LIYEL IMOKE TO THE
PEOPLE OF THE STATE ON THURSDAY, 29TH MAY, 2008**

Fellow Cross Riverians, friends of the state and well-wishers, I salute you all on this memorable day which marks our first anniversary since taking over the mantle of leadership and governance of our beloved state. I recall with nostalgia, my pledge and vow to give the best in the service of our people and nation.

Today, after 12 challenging months of committed effort, I wish first to thank every one of you for your continued encouragement and belief in us which have enabled us to remain on course. Today, I renew the pledge of never betraying that trust.

During the past 12 months, we have experienced some high points and some setbacks which together have helped in strengthening our resolve to forge on in the direction of our goals and collective aspiration.

The process of consolidating our past achievements and building a vibrant future has since begun in earnest. With your continued co-operation and support, we shall surely attain the greatest of heights.

As it is with every beginning, only few are able to grasp the concept embedded in the intricacies of the planning stages. Only when the structure begins to take shape will others join in the chorus to signify the recognition of the emerging edifice with which all would want to identify.

Twelve months in the life of an Administration is clearly ample time to ascertain the direction it is going with every justification. In my inaugural speech, I had said that our mission is to serve the people of Cross River State by improving and sustaining a vibrant economy with the security and material well being of everyone as the ultimate goal.

Although it is impossible to capture in detail every important activity undertaken by government in this past year, in a single broadcast, permit me to briefly mention a few on this occasion. I must say that the journey so far has given us every hope that the future will indeed be the success we intend it to be.

Attention has been paid to providing an enabling legislation for the execution of some of our developmental activities. Accordingly, we sought for and received every legislative endorsement required to back our development agenda.

To date, at least 9 executive bills which reflect the blueprint of this Administration have been passed by the State House of Assembly. They include:

- a) The Border Communities Development Commission Act;
- b) The Rural Development Agency Act;
- c) The State Electricity Agency Act;
- d) The Investment Promotion Bureau Act;
- e) The Tourism Development Levy Act;
- f) The State Planning Commission Amendment Act;
- g) The Road Maintenance Agency Act;
- h) The Local Government Law Amendment Act.
- i) The 2008 Appropriation Bill Act;

Consequently, we have set up new institutions and agencies with clear mandates and defined programmes which indeed provide the direction and road map of our development thrust. Furthermore,

with the institutionalization of Due Process in the conduct of all government business, we are beginning to realise the objective of value for money spending in government. The openness and transparency of the procurement processes should and is translating to more opportunities for our indigenous businesses to participate in the provision of goods and services to our government and consequently to the people.

TOURISM

Cross River State is acknowledged as the premier tourism destination in Nigeria. Accordingly, tourism remains one of the major planks on which our development efforts rest. I would like to seize the opportunity presented by this occasion to speak reassuringly about one of our premier tourism projects - the TINAPA Business Resort. In spite of the delays in receiving favourable regulatory and operational guidelines from the Federal Government, a lot is happening in TINAPA. We thank Mr. President for the support he has given us in restructuring the facility and call on all government agencies particularly the Nigerian Customs to partner with us in the realisation of our vision for TINAPA as the Premier destination for trading, business and leisure in the sub region. TINAPA is certainly due to take off shortly. In the interim, we have assisted TINAPA in securing a

W2.5 billion facility for the completion of outstanding works in TINAPA as well as its operating expenses.

Beyond progressing the actualisation of the TINAPA dream, Cross River State has secured the hosting rights for KORA, the foremost African Musical Awards for the next five years. This alone is expected to attract about 10,000 tourists and create jobs for an estimated 3,000 artisans while generating about \$4 million in expected revenue from sponsorship and other rights.

The 2007 Calabar Carnival and Christmas festival was acknowledged as the largest and most colourful carnival and festival ever. The Carnival and Christmas Festival are now a strong feature on the global annual events calendar of tourists and other visitors. The Carnival has been duly registered in accordance with the copyright laws of the land with the private sector taking a lead role in endorsement & sponsorship of the Carnival and Christmas celebrations. The 2008 Carnival and Christmas festival promises to be even bigger and better than the 2007 event.

Other notable achievements in this sector include the completion of a Tourism Master Plan for the State.

Furthermore, we are training about 2,000 Cross Riverians to handle various tourism services in the State.

Further capitalizing on our tourism potential and to guarantee the viability of TINAPA as a tourism destination while satisfying the growing demands of Nigerians for a place of distinct leisure, government is facilitating the development of complementary facilities including a first of its kind in West Africa World Class (Amusement) Theme Park, an International Convention Centre and 5 star hotel to cater to the exponential growth in the number of visitors to Calabar, particularly business tourists. The projected date for completion and commissioning is December 2010.

The Calabar MONORAIL project is set to commence in earnest. The project will be a first of its kind in the sub region and in the first phase, will link the Calabar International Airport with TINAPA with several stops in between. Initial structural issues with the project financiers have since been resolved and we have taken delivery of the first consignments of steel products and other materials for the project. The MONORAIL project will be commissioned in December 2009.

The flagship of our leisure tourism development effort, The Obudu Ranch Resort is now under new management. The Management team has since resumed at the Ranch and offer the best value to visitors, tourists, holiday-makers and business travellers. The new International conferencing facility has been commissioned, offering first class equipment and facilities for conferences, workshops and retreats. Working with the new management, we expect to put all facilities into full operation before the end of the year and to develop new facilities to meet the growing demand.

Meanwhile, work is ongoing to provide electricity at the Obudu Ranch Resort and the adjoining communities.

CALABAR ENERGY CITY

Cross River State has been acknowledged as the cleanest, greenest and most peaceful state in Nigeria. We are blessed with a serene and secure environment. As one of the States in the Niger delta and with our proximity to the JDZ and other offshore oil operations, more and more industry players are setting up operational bases and ancillary facilities in the State which translates to significant direct private investment in the state. The Unicem cement plant due to be

commissioned this year and the Acelor Mittal Oil & Gas steel pipeline plants are just a few. In order to meet this demand for a conducive environment for doing business in the region, the government is facilitating the development of the Calabar Energy City and Industrial Park to be located within proximate distance of the TINAPA free trade zone. The city will be a first of its kind and will offer first class residential, cultural and entertainment facilities to its residents. The city and its complementary industrial park will be served with an Independent Power Plant and other infrastructural amenities.

Calabar plays host to the headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command and the Amphibious Brigade of the Nigerian Army. This will complement our effort at providing a most secure, safe and serene environment for investment particularly to the Oil & Gas sector. The Energy city and park will be developed to provide the most secure environment for the industry. Construction work will commence in the 4th quarter of this year.

AGRICUL TURE

The sector with the greatest potential for poverty reduction amongst our people is undoubtedly, agriculture. Recognizing this fundamental fact, our administration intends to revolutionize

agriculture through the provision of subsidies and other incentives that encourage farming and ultimately offer a fair return to farmers for their products. The Cross River Agricultural and Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARES) is the vehicle which presently drives this new initiative designed to revolutionise our farming methods. The scheme has identified pineapple, cassava, rice, cocoa, oil palm and rubber as crops in which we not only have comparative advantage but also capacity to produce in large quantities. We intend to assist farmers in sourcing directly for markets while at the same time increasing output to levels that can sustain processing facilities in the State. With the growing demand for rice, we intend to develop all 4000 hectares in Bansara and other rice producing communities in the state.

Under the 'CARES' scheme, government is raising millions of cocoa and palm seedlings for distribution to farmers while fertilizers and assorted pesticides have been imported for the same purposes at subsidised rates. We have also expanded our agric credit scheme with an additional placement of W75 million in various banks for lending to farmers. Other programmes too numerous to be mentioned here are equally on-going. However, I must not fail to mention the back to farming scheme for all members of EXCO and all

elected officials of government under which they are expected to cultivate 10 hectares of any chosen crop starting this farming season. I expect to officially launch the scheme next month.

HEALTH

The free healthcare scheme for pregnant women and children under the age of five is designed to address the unacceptably high maternal and infant mortality rate in the State. The scheme offers free medical care to pregnant women and children under the age of five. For the scheme to realise its objectives, there was an urgent need to renovate and equip all health care facilities in the State. We have also commenced recruitment, training and retraining of thousands of health workers at both primary and secondary levels. In order to attract and retain competent professionals needed to meet the growing demand and to meet with minimum WHO (World Health Organisation) benchmarks; we have introduced a new medical practice allowance payable only to practicing professionals. Effective July 2008, all such professionals engaged by the State will be entitled to the allowance which puts them at par with Federal workers in the State; effectively reducing the high rate of attrition presently experienced in the sector.

Furthermore, to meet the anticipated increase in demand occasioned by the free health care scheme, government will complete, equip, furnish. and make operational, all 6 General Hospitals currently under construction by December this year. This will be complemented by the ongoing renovation and equipping of 196 Health centres and 14 general hospitals across the State. In our effort to meet the obvious growing demand for health professionals, funds have been released to the 6 schools of nursing and midwifery in the State, which unfortunately are without accreditation, to upgrade their facilities preparatory to the next accreditation visit by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The same goes for the College of Health Technology which is also yet to receive accreditation.

Over 460,660 doses of Artemisinin Base Combination Therapy (ACT) have been distributed to the 18 Local Government Councils in the State for the treatment of malaria, which has remained a scourge, particularly among mothers and their infants. Similarly, different types and sizes of insecticide treated nets have been distributed to pregnant women and children under five years for malaria prevention.

EDUCATION

Because "human resource" is seen as the most important of all resources, education is regarded as the bedrock of development. Government is therefore anxious to sanitise our public schools as a way of safeguarding the future of our society. In spite of the efforts of previous Administrations, our WAEC pass rate is still less than 25% - one of the lowest in the country. Our children are not able to compete in the new global economy. Accordingly, we are introducing a newly defined minimum standard which must be attained for all public schools in the State by 2011. We will be investing 15 billion naira in infrastructure and manpower development to attain this standard in all our public secondary and primary schools. Our intervention in each school will be comprehensive and complete and will include furnishing of laboratories, procurement of text books, training and retraining of teachers, the provision of desks and other teaching tools, and the upgrading of infrastructure.

We are committed to confronting these challenges and securing the future of our children. We have selected 60 secondary schools across the State for intervention this year. We will also intervene in a similar manner in 135 primary schools this year.

An Executive bill for the establishment of Cross River State College of Education has been forwarded to the State House of Assembly for consideration. The College is expected to admit its first batch of students in September. The college will address our critical middle manpower needs in the education sector. We will also engage qualified and experienced staff for the Cross River State University of Technology (CRUTECH) not only to meet the Staff/student ratio requirements provided by the guidelines of the National University Commission but to ensure that we attain the high academic standards we set for ourselves. I have since directed that in the same vein as is applicable to medical professionals, all academic staff of CRUTECH of the status of Senior Lecturer and above be paid a special allowance that puts them at par with their similarly qualified counterparts in Federal Institutions. Direct funding to the University has been increased by 50% and W3 billion will be spent on capital projects over the next 3 years to facilitate the accreditation of its remaining academic programmes, 19 of which have already received full accreditation, while 7 have interim accreditation. It is our vision that CRUTECH will be recognised internationally for its outstanding academic programs particularly in Tourism and Environmental Conservation, two areas of study which have a direct bearing on our socio-economic situation.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Our approach to development is wholistic and encompassing. With 700 of our population living in rural areas, it is imperative development. Three Executive bills have been passed into law and new agencies set up specifically to intervene at the rural and semi-urban level. The Rural Development Agency will in this quarter commence the process for award of contracts for the construction of over 390km of rural feeder roads across all 18 LGAs at the cost of ₦12 billion. The roads to be executed in this phase are those that have economic benefit particularly, roads that lead to high agriculture and produce output areas. To complement this effort the state government is partnering with the African Development Bank (ADB) in the construction of 475km of rural roads under the Rural Access and Mobility Programme (RAMP). The Rural Development Agency has concluded plans to provide water supply and reticulation to 90 communities at a cost of over ₦3 billion. The Agency will complement the efforts of SUBEB by comprehensively rehabilitating 196 primary schools across the state over the next three years. The first 54 schools are already scheduled for rehabilitation this year. The Agency will also intervene in primary healthcare with the renovation

and construction of 10 health centres, complementing the efforts of the Ministry of Health in this regard.

With less than 50% of our communities having access to electricity, the State Electrification Agency is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all communities in the state are electrified in the next 4 years. This year the Agency will electrify over 80 communities at a cost of over W1.7 billion. The Agency will also electrify remote off-grid communities applying renewable energy technology. The Eburutu communities will be electrified with the assistance of the Japanese government in the second phase of the program. The first phase, electrification of the Ranch and Ranch communities has been completed. The Border Communities Development Commission has as its primary mandate, the provision of infrastructure and amenities in border communities across the State. The Agency will be intervening in at least 35 communities this year. The intention is to establish government presence and provide a sense of belonging to our kin in these communities.

WORKS

As should be expected, good roads and bridges are for us an indispensable requirement in view of their importance in our tourism

and development efforts. This explains why few States have done as much as we have in rehabilitating Federal roads in the State. Federal roads rehabilitated include Ikom/Calabar Highway and Calabar/Itu road.

URBAN RENEWAL

The urban renewal program in Ogoja, Obudu, Calabar Municipality and Calabar South are progressing well with the construction of over 50km of urban roads in the current phase. We intend to construct another 100km of urban roads under the program over the next three years. The Calabar street lighting project has also progressed considerably and will be extended to major streets within the metropolis. The extension of the Calabar water supply scheme has also commenced with over 30,000 households expected to be served upon completion. We expect to commence the construction of similar schemes in Ikom, Ogoja, Obudu, Obubra and Itigidi later this year.

We are also in the process of procuring equipment and supplies for the 5 Urban Development Authorities, i.e., Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja and Obudu to strengthen their capacity to improve on their performance. We shall not compromise on our standards and will

maintain our reputation for being the cleanest and greenest State in Nigeria.

The tree and grass planting programmes will be sustained with over a million trees expected to be planted this season.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

We set up the new department of Public Transportation to address the anticipated challenges that will arise from the rapid growth of Calabar and other metropolis in the State. The department has amongst others, been charged with responsibility for providing a modern, safe and efficient transportation system for the city of Calabar. The department has procured 15 additional Metro blue buses and will soon commence a new scheduled bus service with designated arrival and departure times. We intend to procure at least 30 more buses and increase the number of designated bus stops across the city. The department will also, in this quarter, introduce the new taxi service in partnership with private operators. An initial 50 taxis will be procured in this phase.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Councils are essential adjuncts in service delivery. In recognition of this, we proposed necessary amendments to the local government law geared towards further streamlining the roles and functions of the Local Government Councils. By so doing we are better placed to collectively realise the objective of the Integrated Rural Development initiative and to delivery qualitative service to our people at this tier. The new law not only strengthens our Local Government Administration but also institutionalises due process and accountability at that tier.

With this in place, Local Governments are better funded and their impact is expected to be felt in our communities.

DEBT MANAGEMENT

The State has a significant debt burden which if not well managed would stifle our ambitious developmental programmes. In recognition of this challenge, the department of Debt Management has been set up and charged with the responsibility for ascertaining the level of the debt burden and the management of the debt. The department has successfully renegotiated some of the TINAPA debt and is currently negotiating more favourable terms with other

creditors. The department is also in the process of verifying and authenticating all debts and provision has been made in the budget for payments of verified debts. We will be forwarding an executive bill to the House of Assembly to institutionalise Debt Management and give necessary legislative backing to the office.

ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

As we strive to meet our developmental goals and objectives, we endorse the concept of sustainable development. Our claim to holding more than a quarter of the world's remaining tropical rainforest - a natural habitat to several endangered wildlife species places the State squarely on the global eco-tourism map. We intend to maintain this position. Beyond that, we intend to incorporate an environmentally friendly culture. We are in the process of developing a biological landfill outside Calabar and intend to introduce modern concepts of waste collection and management to all parts of the State. It is our intention to encourage contractors to execute projects in the State using environmentally friendly materials and concepts, as well as promoting smart designs in our new projects.

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Regrettably, our forests are under threat of extinction due to the uncontrolled activities of poachers and illegal timber merchants. Every effort must be made to protect this asset. Accordingly, approval has been given for the recruitment and engagement of forest guards & other staff for the Forestry Commission to better police the forest and check the activities of illegal loggers. We will be strengthening the relationship with the host communities by paying royalties as at when due and educating them on the value of the resource.

We will jealously guard our deserved title of being the cleanest and greenest State in Nigeria. We are putting in place a sustainable programme for environmental sanitation in partnership with the private sector. Orders have been placed for new dumpsters and the six rear-loading trucks parked in the Governor's Office will be commissioned upon the delivery of the dumpsters. To strengthen and institutionalise this effort, a bill to establish the Cross River State Waste Management Agency is being forwarded to the House of Assembly. Its passage into law will go a long way in institutionalising the waste management initiative of the Administration.

PUBLIC SERVICE

There is no gainsaying the importance of the Public Service in the implementation of key government decisions, programmes and policies. It is in light of this that this Administration in the bid to enhance the capacity of its workforce has embarked on the training of its Public servants in areas deemed necessary for the effective dispatch of their duties. These training programs which are also in line with the SERVICOM mandate include but are not limited to enhancement of ICT skills, capacity and human resource development. The ongoing rehabilitation of the Management Development Institute (MDI) will when completed provide a most modern and conducive environment for training and retraining of our public servants.

Furthermore, government in its bid to motivate this all important workforce has approved promotions across board up to December 2007; we have reviewed the Public Service Rules implementing a reduction in the number of years for qualification for promotion.

We have also introduced a vehicle ownership scheme which was launched earlier in the year. In the very near future, we would break ground for the staff housing scheme.

It is our belief that by implementing the outlined programmes for the Public Service, we would be developing the engine room that would drive the 7 point agenda of this Administration. .

PROJECT MONITORING

We recently set up a Project and Programmes Monitoring and Evaluation Unit to track the execution of all on-going projects In the State as well as monitor the implementation of our programmes. We believe it is not enough to initiate viable projects and programmes with great prospects for the people of this State - we believe it is expedient to ensure that such projects and programmes progress as planned.

CONCLUSION

Fellow Cross Riverians and compatriots,
my intention here today as stated earlier, is not to bring to your notice every activity of government that has ensued in the last 12 months, but to articulate the direction in which we are oriented. We

have a clear vision of where we intend to position Cross River State. Detailed and deliberate planning, resolute execution and conviction would ensure that our efforts meet with our objectives, in concert with your expectations.

And so today we offer you once again new beacons of hope in our journey to the Cross River State of our dreams, the Cross River State of your dreams. With your support, solidarity and prayers, we shall surely see our collective dream transformed to reality.

Thank you.

God bless you all

God bless Cross River State

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria