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MAKGETLA: My name is Tumi Makgetla, it's the second of September, 2009, I'm in Abuja, Nigeria and I'm here with Professor (Humphrey) Assisi Asobie, head of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) for Nigeria as of the beginning of 2008. He has been involved in the program since February 2004 as the head of transparency in Nigeria. Thank you for joining as part of these interviews with people engaged in reform.

ASOBIE: *Thank you for coming.*

MAKGETLA: Before you begin, can I just firstly confirm that you have consented to this voluntary interview?

ASOBIE: *Yes I have.*

MAKGETLA: Perhaps we could begin by you giving me a brief overview of your career and how you came to be involved in working with the EITI.

ASOBIE: *Ok, I have been an activist. First I was President of Academic Staff Union of Universities, a trade union that files for the promotion of the welfare of university teachers. That was 1996, February to 2000 February. That was actually under military rule, much of that period was under (Sani) Abacha, but also (Abdulsalami) Abubaker and then (Olusegun) Obasanjo. Subsequently I became the President of Transparency in Nigeria. Indeed I was first Vice President from 1998 to 2003 and then became the President from 2004 to September 2007.*

When the government initiated Nigeria's accession to the EITI movement, my organization decided that I should represent civil society. When the government requested, actually the government requested that we should send a representative of civil society and my organization decided that I should go and represent it. In that process I then became one of the 28 members of the national stakeholders working group, which was inaugurated on 16th February, 2004. I was specifically named as representative for civil society.

Also as a result of that, when EITI board was constituted as a global EITI board constituted in 2006, I contested with some others in Africa and also became one of the representatives, one of the first representatives of civil society on the EITI board. I still represent—I am still a member of the EITI board, but no longer a civil society representative. Once I was appointed the chairman of NEITI (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) in 2008, I changed my status from being representative of civil society to representing Nigeria. That transition took place in 2008.

In 2009, this year at Doha I was reappointed also as representative of an implementing country with Ghana as my alternate.

MAKGETLA: Great. So when you think back to the early days of your involvement with this process, what did you identify as the main challenges or priorities for you in your role?

ASOBIE: *Ok, first I think it is important for the record to state that I wasn't in the driver's seat at this point, Oby Ezekwesili was. She was the chairperson and she was assisted first by a lady called Apo Okigbo and then later by Dr. Bright Okogu who is now the Director General of the Budget Office, so they were at the driver's seat. But as I said, I was representing civil society so my role was mainly to try and mobilize civil society to support the initiative and at the same time to perform a specific role which is using the information, the data that I disclosed through the*

process of auditing for holding government to account. That was the major role of civil society.

The challenge that I faced was first trying to convince civil society that I was an authentic representative of civil society. The reason was that civil society in Nigeria didn't like the manner in which I was appointed. They felt that the slot should have been kept open to all civil society organizations for them to choose whomever they liked. They didn't have anything against me as a person, they knew my pedigree, it had something to do against the process. But we were able to work out a compromise. The compromise was to have first a number of institutions that were created in order to broaden the engagement of civil society.

So one of the things we did was to create what we called a civil society steering committee. This became an enlargement of a subcommittee of the national stakeholders working group. The national stakeholders working group worked on the various subcommittees. One of the subcommittees was the civil society subcommittee, which was made up of only a few people, I think about four of us from the NSWG (National Stakeholder Working Group). But in order to overcome the problems that we had in civil society we had to enlarge it to include many more representatives of civil society under the civil society steering committee. That was one way of solving that.

The second way of solving it was that we also decided that there would be quarterly interaction between civil society groups' representatives and directly with NSWG once in three months. The third way of also dealing with that was if we then formulated a memorandum of understanding between civil society and NSWG under which civil society was given the freedom to formulate their own programs independent of NSWG and actually carry out those programs, whether or not NSWG approved.

So with this it was possible for us to overcome the initial reluctance of civil society to engage.

MAKGETLA: Since you have now been placed into the driving seat as it were of the NEITI, what would you say your key challenges are in that role?

ASOBIE: *The challenges are different and much more problematic. The very first challenge as I see it is to build a team, to build the NSWG and the Secretariat into one harmonious team working together and overcoming the Nigerian tendency to be involved in internal wrangles and work harmoniously together. That was the first challenge.*

The second challenge is to practice what you preach, that is to actually go on with the tradition of transparency in governance within Nigeria itself. Because if you don't practice that, then obviously you are not in a moral, a strong moral position to push those principles outside the organization. That is the second challenge. The third challenge is to build capacity for the Secretariat. That is to say, to have very well-qualified, competent, patriotic staff but who also are remunerated and therefore sufficiently motivated to be committed to this struggle and therefore devote all their time and all their energy to working for the organization.

The fourth challenge is of course finance. That is to say having enough money to carry out all the activities that the NEITI Act, which was passed into law in May 2007, demands that we should perform. The fifth challenge of course is to

overcome the broader, if you like, social, economic and political challenges within the Nigerian environment.

MAKGETLA: That's an interesting set of issues that I hope we can discuss later, how you've begun to address that. But, as you came in, did you have a sense that there was an opportunity for change and the time was right?

ASOBIE: *Well, yes. In the first instance it was encouraging that the idea of accidentally, global EITI didn't really emanate from civil society because of Nigeria. It emanated from government itself. Obasanjo, sorry Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had gone to Berlin in the autumn of 2003. I think his visit had something to do with the tenth anniversary of Transparency International which as you know has its Secretariat in Berlin because he used to be, Obasanjo used to be, until 1999, the chairman of the Advisory Committee of Transparency International. So he was invited in the ceremonies marking the tenth anniversary. I think he used the opportunity to make a public statement declaring Nigeria's interest in participating in EITI. So that was the first thing he did.*

The thing that he did, he came home and then set up the National Stakeholder Working Group, inaugurated it. Even before the Publish What You Pay coalition was created in Nigeria that had happened. The Publish What You Pay makes everything—I remember February, whereas the inauguration of NSWG took place 16th of February. So you could see that it was driven by government, really. I think the reason why that happened was partly because both Obasanjo and Oby Ezekwesili had been associated at the global level for Transparency International.

MAKGETLA: Ok.

ASOBIE: *You know Transparency International is global, it had something to do with initiation of EITI globally. So I think that was one good thing. Second thing was because we had just moved from military rule to civilian rule, the political environment was more conducive to the issue of reform than before. Third point I think is that Obasanjo had completed his first term in office. That was from 1999 to 2003. During that first term he was extremely cautious. He was playing a lot of politics that meant that he really wouldn't really pursue some reforms seriously. His main preoccupation was to gather sufficient number of allies to be able to get a second term. Consequently he didn't pursue reform seriously.*

So his reform started immediately he got a second term in 2003. That coincided also with the issue of the global movement for EITI. So I think that internationally and locally the environment was right for the introduction of EITI. But I think also, the third point was that through the reports that had been carried out by the World Bank, it was clear that Nigeria was losing a lot of money in the oil sector and that there was a lot of corruption in the oil sector. So there was also an internal reason for Nigeria to want to institute a regime of transparency and accountability in the sector. So the time was just right for the introduction of EITI.

MAKGETLA: You described the many challenges that you saw as priorities for you when you became head of the NEITI. Did you have a sense that there were preexisting strategies or lessons from other countries' approaches that would help you, sort of guide you in approaching these?

ASOBIE: *Well in some areas yes, in some others no. If you take the first point that I made for example, the points of ensuring that they build a team within the NSWG and the Secretariat and at the same time introduce the principles of transparency and*

accountability within the organization. That required actually dealing with a peculiar Nigerian situation. Let me explain. There is culture of secrecy in bureaucracy. More important, there is also a culture of not being too open about events, even in the society, you are not encouraged to speak out freely about things that are embarrassing. Ok? For example, if you are ill you are not expected to declare that I have AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) or STD (sexually transmitted disease). You don't do such a thing, so the environment doesn't really promote transparency as such.

So when you now want to introduce transparency within your own organization, you expect to have certain resistance. I think, I don't know whether I'm wrong but I think this is a peculiarly Nigerian situation rather than a general situation. Therefore you needed to find a way of managing it so that you don't create problems. But the good luck I had was that we already had some agencies that were promoting some ethical principles within the country. For example, we had the Code of Conduct Bureau already that had some code of conduct for public officials. So what I did was to invite them to liaise with NEITI Secretariat and do some retreat for us on the ethical code of ethics for the organization. So the help came rather from inside, not from outside. That was with respect to that.

But with respect to an issue like strengthening the Secretariat, yes, one could not only borrow a leaf from outside, but more importantly get support from outside. As a matter of fact without DFID (Department for International Development), it would have been impossible to start EITI and perform as well as we did during the first four years or so. They came in with a lot of money. They came in also with a lot of technical support. They never lost view of the initial Secretariat. They came in also with some research done by other organizations about the role of civil society and so on in driving EITI. So we had a lot of training from outside. We had a lot of input from outside. We had the initial workshops to become familiar with what you needed to do. So in some cases yes, in some cases no, the sources of inspiration came from inside.

MAKGETLA: Can I ask you a bit more about your efforts to build a team and to encourage transparency internally? You mentioned bringing in the code of conduct bureau. Can you describe exactly what you saw as sort of the problems that need to be addressed and then how an effort like that, perhaps sending stuff on retreats was going to address some of the perceived difficulties?

ASOBIE: *It doesn't really start with sense of the retreat, it was the members of the board, the NSWG. The first retreat was for them. We have yet to have the retreat for staff because we haven't finished recruitment. The retreat had issues that went beyond ethical code of conduct. For example it had training on transformation and leadership. By the way, I also am interested in transformation, I've been trained by UNDP (United Nations Development Program) in transformational leadership and currently I'm leading a group of professors to introduce transformational leaders as a course in the Nigerian university system. So I knew a lot about transformational leadership. I knew the experts in it. So I invited them to give us a talk on that. We also had talk on the NEITI Act and so on. So it was a much broader spectrum based, more focused retreat. But what specifically what the code of conduct did was to guide the NSWG members into themselves, formulating what they considered acceptable and minimum code of ethics for themselves.*

MAKGETLA: And did that become the code for the—?

ASOBIE: Yes, for the NSWG today.

MAKGETLA: Great. Could I ask you maybe to describe some of the important changes that you were able to advance since you became the head of the NEITI? I'm sure you were involved in quite a number, but if you could perhaps identify those that you felt were most significant in terms of their impact directly on communities or in terms of their indirect impact and widening this space for further reforms.

ASOBIE: *I think perhaps the most significant thing that has happened since 2008 is that we have been able to bring in zonal representatives. That wasn't due to me, it was due to government itself and the law. The law provides, unlike before, that you should now have representatives from the six geo-political zones. We have south-south which includes Niger delta for example, southeast which is mainly Igbo speaking. Southwest which is mainly Yoruba, northeast which is mainly Folani or rather Kanuri, northwest and north central and so on. These are the six geo-political zones. So we now have representatives in those areas.*

What that means, the implication of that is that as long as we then do the what you call road shows, that is communication strategy which involves taking the report, the audit report down to the people and we usually do it in zones. We now have people within NSWG who will drive the process. That was not there before. Before we had to look for who will drive the process. Now those who will drive the process are integrated within the governing board of NSWG. That's number one.

The second thing is that for the first time we now have—again, that was the law, I merely implemented it. We now have an executive secretary. Initially when we were inaugurated in 2004 under Obasanjo there was no law, we had a secretary who was merely assisting the chair. That meant that both the chairman, obviously because they were part time, the secretary was also part time, even when we changed in the nomenclature to executive secretary, it was still acting executive secretary because it was a part time—it was actually full time assistant to finance minister. So now we have a full time executive secretary who will then focus all his attention to all the day on organizing the Secretariat.

The third thing, sorry second thing that I did, the third thing that I did, this one was not necessarily as a result of the law, was to meet the President with the, actually in company of the Secretariat's secretary. Fortunately the President also invited the Minister of Finance and the Chief of Staff and we discussed specific issues. The first issue that for me was most important was the issue of getting an attractive salary scale for the Secretariat secretarial staff. There was no scale when I came in. We had no scale. In fact, they were all regarded as consultants to DFID. Consequently they were paid as consultants. So DFID was providing the money. But I knew we would ultimately take over the responsibility for paying staff.

So they needed a salary scale different from the civil service salary scale, which is unattractive and cannot attract good staff. The President approved in principle. Now total approval has been confirmed in writing so we have a new salary scale, which is fairly attractive for staff. That means that it is now possible to recruit the high level staff of very competent people who can easily match the kind of capacity we have in the regulatory agencies and the oil companies. For me that is very, very important in terms of our capacity to deliver.

The other things I did are merely drawing from our experience in the past. Like we reconstituted a steering committee of civil society. We reactivated what we call the interministerial task team. The interministerial task team is a team made up of representatives of regulatory agencies like Federal Law Revenue Service,

the Department for Petroleum Resources, Office of the Accountant General of the Federation, Central Bank—all those agencies of government that have to do with revenues flowing from the oil sector, or if you like, the mineral sector, the oil and mineral sector. They are formed into an interministerial task team. It is chaired by me and their job is to look at the observations and recommendations of the auditors as they concern governance of process issues and see how they can—what the deficiencies, the deficiencies identified by them can be remedied. So it is like a remediation team to assist these regulatory agencies to build capacity in order to avoid the observed inability to perform their functions as reflected in the audit reports. So I merely reactivated it, it was there before. So that's not a new thing.

So I think the major area of change has been in the area of building the Secretariat and also building the ethical basis of the Obasanjo regime.

MAKGETLA: Before we go into more detail on those reforms, can you discuss how you were able to build support for some of these because this is something that people sometimes find quite difficult, to build support for their reform efforts. So maybe if you could give an idea of what sort of individuals or institutions you would look to to support your efforts.

ASOBIE: *Of course, if you take the issue, which I consider to be the most important of getting a good scale of salary for the—the most important person had to be the President. Of course we couldn't go to the President directly so we had to use people who were close to them. Fortunately we have champions within the presidency. We have people, we have somebody for example who had worked as a member of the board in NSWG under Oby Ezekwesili and I sat with him so he is now one of the advisors to the President. I would rather not mention his name. We have some other person who also is an advisor to the President who for a very short time actually served as chairman of NEITI before I became chairman. It is little known that he sat as chairman actually, that was a very short period before I became chairman. So he was also interested in the thing.*

But I think much more recently, I must say that we received tremendous support from the Secretary to the Government of Federation who is the person that we formally report through to the President officially. He has been of tremendous support in the things we've done in recent times and so has been the current chairman of the Salaries and Wages Commission. So there are people scattered all over the place that have been very helpful to us. I think generally, frankly, within the Nigerian government there is very good will, very strong good will for NEITI, that is what I have discovered. Of course, as I said, the most important person has been the President.

When we presented to him in June last year our problems, including financial problems, on all issues we got a positive response, on all issues. The issues were about six. We got a positive response throughout. So he supports us very, very strongly.

MAKGETLA: Are there any challenges that you would identify in trying to build support amongst people by contacting maybe the people you mentioned or other influential individuals? Are there any sort of issues that arise that you feel are worth mentioning?

ASOBIE: *Yes, you know, for me EITI is not so much about disclosure or reporting, it is about reporting but I don't think that is the crux of EITI. I think the crux of EITI is the capacity of civil society to use the information and data disclosed and*

reported to hold government to account. That is where the challenge is really. How do you first of all identify socially committed, serious-minded civil society activists that you can work with in that very difficult area. It is a very difficult area when you begin to ask questions, what have you done with the money, it's very difficult. So how do you identify such people?

Two, how do you win them away from the traditional orientation of competition and get them to cooperate and work together and build coalitions in order to do this very difficult task. And three, perhaps even most important of all how do you train them so that they begin to acquire the specific scientific tools for doing their work because it's not just something you wake up from your bed or from the university and say you know how to do it. Knowledge requires, if it is budget tracking for example, it requires training. If it is something like using the report card, one of the tools we use in transparency to evaluate the work of local governments, it requires training. If it is a question of using integrity pack for example as a tool for ensuring transparency and procurement, it requires training. There are tools that we need to use.

One of the things we find in Nigeria is that most of the civil society organizations are not aware that there are tools and so the whole thing ends up in having workshops, issuing communiqués, writing what they call shadow reports, criticizing the agency, the actual work of holding government to account is not being done frankly. That is the area that would make impact on the lives of the people because EITI really is about poverty reduction, it is about improving the wealth of the people, basically that's what it is. It is about sustainable development. You cannot get all this by merely publishing reports and disseminating them.

On the other side of it, it is not government side now, it is civil society side, working in collaboration with us. For me that is the greatest challenge really. I have not been able to overcome that challenge yet. We have yet to know how to overcome it.

MAKGETLA: So as you just mentioned, these are things that you still need to work out, how to address. But have you had any strategies that seem to be hopeful or successful, or seem to promise success in the future on some of these issues about maybe identifying people who are serious minded. Do you have suggestions for how to go about doing that?

ASOBIE: Yes, obviously, we have had a number of engagements and it is trial and error really, the very first thing we thought about was in order to identify people who have roots in society rather than people who are merely individuals fronting as organizations. We decided to have some kind of election and want civil society organizations to do their—elect their representative, it didn't work, emphatically did not work. It collapsed.

MAKGETLA: Can you describe that?

ASOBIE: Oh yes, we gathered them in a room and we, I think we mismanaged it somewhat I must confess, because I don't think that every person we invited was given the information that you were going to have election. That required to be done. We didn't do it. So when we tried to do the election on the day it collapsed. They wouldn't agree to election. So we had to go back to the drawing board and rethink. So we then met again. I said, ok, let's forget about the election, let's first of all identify the clusters.

Since there are so many civil society organizations, let's identify the clusters under which they will then send representatives. That worked. You know, they were able to identify some six or so clusters including—no I think there were more than six, maybe about twelve. Then at that stage we couldn't still pick the representatives. We just stopped at identifying clusters. We had to hold another meeting where they then chose representatives. But even then it is not ended because you know part of the problem we have is multiplicity of civil society organizations, multiplicity of coalitions of civil society organizations, with overlapping membership.

So again, right now, as I'm talking, when I say we've gotten a set of representatives to form the steering committee we have a question from Coalition for Change for example. Coalition for Change argues that they have a memorandum of understanding with us, that they will work with us, and they interpret that to mean that we should work with only them as a coalition. My attitude to that is let's look at the memorandum of understanding and see where actually that clause exists, where we can only work with you. So there are always challenges.

I think the attitude to which, really, from our side and from their side, that you'll have is if we all agree that there is so much work to be done in Nigeria that we should bring in as many people as possible to do that work, that we should all work together, not work at cross purposes to one another. If we have that attitude and we're really actually committed, passionately committed to the issue of eliminating corruption and providing transparency, then I think we can overcome some of these challenges quite easily. But everything depends upon holding discussions with them and making sure that we allow free debates and the consensus emerges and we work with the consensus.

MAKGETLA: You mentioned the second issue was how to get away from the traditional orientation of competition. Is this what you were referring to here or is there anything else you'd add to strategies to deal with that?

ASOBIE: *It's not just about competition frankly, it is also about environmental things, how civil society operates in the country. When you have an environment of high level of unemployment you are bound to have a situation in which civil society and nonprofit organizations actually expects to earn some living from their work. That is a dilemma. Donors come with the idea because much of civil society in Nigeria is actually donor funded. Donors come with the idea that you can't earn a living from this. This is voluntary work and therefore no pay. That is a little—it doesn't take the reality on the ground into consideration. There should be some group of people that are employed to work on a permanent basis in those organizations that are paid as well as those who are volunteers. Ok?*

MAKGETLA: Yes.

ASOBIE: *But I think that one of the ways of dealing with the problem is that we, in NEITI, should also expand our conception of civil society beyond NGO (nongovernment organization) world so that we begin to bring in professional associations like lawyers, accountants and engineers and also trade unions, like trade unions in the oil and gas sector, trade unions in the mining sector, even my of Academic Staff Union of Universities. Now the idea is you then have civil society organizations whose members were actually employed. More important, civil society organizations that are not only membership-based, but more importantly have their own funds. They become more independent; they also become less attracted by what is provided by the donors. Therefore their commitment to the*

fight will be stronger. We haven't done that yet, we are trying to do that. That is where the answer for me lies. That it is defining civil society beyond NGO and getting in professional associations.

MAKGETLA: Do you think there might be resistance from NGOs who feel that their influence might be diluted if this were expanded and how do you imagine you might address that?

ASOBIE: *No my experience is that the resistance is not from them. I think they understand it. I think the problem is, an inbuilt misunderstanding of civil society as NGO even within NEITI itself, which we have to deal with. We have to explain these things clearly to everybody so everybody understands that even EITI itself, the international EITI defines civil society beyond NGOs, it does. In fact, it defines civil society to include even research centers and universities. So it is the broader definition. I think it is something that maybe people don't understand well. I think in a little time we will have them understand that it is something that is useful to do.*

Because when we begin to get into the mining sector, also the mineral sector, we see the absolute necessity to bring in geologists, to bring in mining engineers and so on, otherwise we do not understand what is going on.

MAKGETLA: Well, that's the third issue that you mentioned earlier which was developing the capacity of actors to engage, especially to understand the instruments that you've developed in the process such as the report card, such as some of these budget-tracking mechanisms. What are some of the strategies there that you've developed to do that?

ASOBIE: *One of the things we've done was not done officially really under NEITI, it was done in my capacity as a former President of Transparency in Nigeria. [Indecipherable] wants to be the chairman of NEITI. When I was President of Transparency in Nigeria and at the same time representative of civil society in the board of NEITI I worked with Oby Ezekwesili who was also in Transparency in Nigeria before to get the President to agree to come and open an international conference on integrity pact. This was in 2004, May 2004. So he endorsed it. That was the very first thing that I did then, was to get him to endorse it publicly because that was important for a buy-in.*

I then chose an organization to experiment with the application of that tool and the organization that we chose was Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which is located in Niger Delta. At the point in 2004, the chairman and the executive secretary were not very warm about it. So even though the President had publicly declared his support for it, we couldn't move. The movement then came after I became chairman of NEITI, not from me by the way, but from the managing director then of NDDC who was Timi Alaibe. While I was President of TI (Transparency International) in Nigeria and I had made a presentation to the board of NDDC and he was there, he wasn't in a position to take a decision then, but when he became in a position to take, then he contacted me and asked me to bring TI in again. So we've gone to call twice now, first to talk to the large group of the management of NDDC with Timi Alaibe present and civil society as well. We brought a colleague from Canada, Professor West who used to be the chairman of Transparency International Canada. He is also an expert in integrity pact. He came and gave the talk, both of us gave the talk on the integrity pact.

We followed it up on invitation of the board of NDDC to give a talk to the management alone in detail about how to apply the integrity pact to specific contracts within NDDC. That's what we were before they changed the leadership of NDDC and so we had to start all over again. But what we were doing was to do it on an experimental basis, choosing one or two organizations, choosing a few contracts and see how you can apply it to procurement issues in those areas. That's what we're trying to do and NEITI through me is giving support to this. But as I said, it has not been made official yet, we are waiting until we have a concrete achievement. I will then bring NEITI officially into it.

MAKGETLA: So through that work you're helping to develop the capacity of things like the NDDC to strengthen the oversight, or the contracts improving sort of accountability?

ASOBIE: *It is not really focusing on NDDC. We are using NDDC to experiment as I said. The focus is to introduce the tool. Look, let me tell you my belief. There is a procurement act 2007. That procurement act revised that they would encourage civil society to observe the procurement processes in government agencies. That is there. But it has not been activated. I don't think anybody is observing anything. We ought to observe, for example, consultancy services procurement. We ought to observe recruitment processes, they're not observing. But recently the procurement bureau, the Bureau for Public Procurement, they had a meeting with civil society to encourage them to observe.*

What they have done, what I think is necessary, is for us to use a specific tool to make that possible and the specific tool that is relevant for me is the integrity pact tool which has been used in a number of countries before. So what I'm thinking is if one organization uses it and then it becomes impactful in terms of effectiveness of implementation of procurement and contract, that it would be possible then to duplicate it in other organizations as a tool and get both civil society and agencies observant, to accept it as a very important tool for strengthening the procurement act, the procurement process.

MAKGETLA: One other thing that you've mentioned is the communication strategy of NEITI. So it seems quite important to your work for reasons that you stated to build a public constituency to support the efforts of the organization. Can you describe how you've gone about doing that?

ASOBIE: *As I said, that's one area where we haven't done much at all. We haven't gone beyond merely trying to build the synergy between NEITI board and civil society organizations. We have a plan, which I hope will materialize this month, of moving from zone to zone, using the latest audit report, which is the 2005 audit report, and using it as a basis for discussing the issues in the oil and gas sector. That will be number one issue. As I said, I'm hoping that this will be driven, this process will be driven by the zonal representatives on the NEITI board.*

Once we do that, then at that level the process of selecting those that will participate in those zonal road shows will involve getting to know in more concrete detailed terms the civil society organizations existing at those levels that we can actually work with. Hopefully such interactive sessions will provide opportunities for us to know the entry points in the different zones and the different states where we will be able to establish a process of monitoring the application of the revenues arising from the oil sector. Fortunately there are two developments independent of NEITI that will help us.

One development is that the chairman of the Governance Forum, that is the governor of Kwara state, Dr. (Abubakar Bukola) Saraki, has gotten in touch with me personally and also the NEITI Secretariat asking us to make a presentation of the audit report to them, to the Governance Forum. That is one good development as far as I'm concerned. That will help the process. So that we hope that in that presentation we will convince them that you must go beyond revenue transparency and also talk about expenditure transparency. I know their own interest to be how much revenue is coming to the federation account, how much is actually distributing to states. Is the government distributing all that comes? That would be their problem. That would be the major interest, they have an interest. The interest you have is to push it a little bit further and ask can we partner with you and push the issue of expenditure transparency? Not that we need their permission, but we need their buy-in, their cooperation. That's one development.

The second development is that again independent of NEITI some CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) and some donor agencies by the way, are working with specific states, particularly the Niger Delta to push the issue of expenditure transparency. You must have heard of BEITI, Bayelsa Expenditure and Income Transparency Initiative. I think it is an initiative that deals with expenditure transparency rather than revenue transparency.

Then there is also a movement by [Indecipherable] those states. In fact, they even contacted me asking me to come and become part of it. They are working in partnership with the Norwegian Ambassador to Nigeria and the Norwegian government supporting, [Indecipherable] is an NGO headed by [Debbie Dogolo?] and they're trying to push also the issue of expenditure transparency. So in other words there is demand for NEITI's work in the area of allocation of resources and the law empowers us also to deal with the application of resources. So once the demand, we then follow up the demand and ensure that this happens, that you have not concretely established an entry point and a plan for this. [interruption – end of file one]

MAKGETLA: So you've described ways in which NEITI is working with civil society organizations, they've targeted groups. Do you have an interest in developing sort of the general public support or any other groups that you want to get the support of for your initiatives?

ASOBIE: Yes, obviously. You know, our work encompasses, according to the law, the following one, ensuring transparency and accountability in revenue receipts, revenue payments to government, revenue receipts by government. Ensuring due process in those payments, that is to ensure that they're paid on time and according to whom they should pay it and so on. An aspect of our work which is not mainstream EITI but it is added for the Nigerian situation because of Nigeria's peculiarities, has to do with elimination of corruption in this sector. It is not just promoting transparency but the other side of it, is eliminating corruption, corrupt practices in the sector.

It also has to do with ensuring that the deficiencies in the regulatory agencies, we're preventing them from effectively monitoring, regulating the oil industry, are rarely remedied. So since this is our mandate we then find that in order to deal with the issue of elimination of corruption we don't want to become another anticorruption agency. There are anticorruption agencies. So we are working with them already. We have what you call inter-agency task team. This is different from the one I called before, the inter-ministerial task team. Inter-agency task team is made up of anticorruption agencies, EFCC (Economic and Financial

Crimes Commission), ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission), Code of Conduct Bureau, Public Complaints Commission. But it also included things like Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Corporate Affairs Commission and so on, even the police. It is a large group of people.

We held a retreat with them, that is NEITI. By the way, we have a unit in NEITI called TUGAR. It is this Technical Unit on Governance and Anticorruption Reforms (TUGAR). So all of that, but I chair the IATT, I chair the Inter-Agency Task Team. Under that we held a retreat in Kaduna in May and the purpose of the retreat is to try to establish synergy among the anticorruption agencies and move them towards working, to producing a national anticorruption strategy instead of each agency working alone, each of us should work together in the same direction.

Now, if that happens would we then have a problem that deals with corruption. It is easier to deal with a coordinated body that helps us to pursue other government officials or an oil company that is found to be corrupt in terms of the way in which they handle the transactions of the oil and gas sector. So that is already going on. In fact, through that medium we are able to do an assessment, a self-assessment of the performance of Nigeria along the guidelines of UNCAC, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. We are going to go together, all of us to Doha in November to report a common report which has never happened before. This is being coordinated by NEITI through TUGAR. So that is one agency.

You also need to work in very close collaboration not just with the officials of the regulatory agencies but with ministers themselves. That was the major reason why in spite of public criticism, I insisted that we needed to present this report to the President and council in order to get an added buy-in from the ministers at the ministerial level so that when we then present issues that officials cannot deal with—there are so many issues arising from the report that these officials cannot deal with at their level. We will have easier access to the ministers to present the matter to them, so that is another set of people.

The one that is often neglected is the legislature. The legislature is very, very important. In fact, even at the international level, the role of legislatures is neglected. Nigeria recognized the importance of the legislature pushing EITI from the beginning. That was why three members of the Nigerian legislature were actually members of the board. This included the then chairman of the Senate Committee on Petroleum. I think he is still the chairman actually, that is Senator Lee Maeba, he is still the chairperson. You then had the Chairman of the House Committee, the House of Representatives Committee of the Legislature, that is Dr. Kiro [Indecipherable]. Then the present Governor of River States, Governor (Rotimi Chibuike) Amaechi, was representing the Speakers of state legislatures. So we brought both the national legislature and the state legislature into the membership of the stakeholders working group. That was the recognition of the importance of the legislature.

Now, in fact, Amaechi played a very key role in drafting the law that we now call NEITI Act. He was chairing the committee on legal issues. So we now have within that law a requirement that we must submit a copy of our reports to the national assembly. The national assembly will ordinarily hold public hearing on it and so we will expect the national assembly to see that there is an overlap between the oversight functions over the oil and gas industry, over the solid mineral sector and the work of NEITI, and do that sort of work, rather than seeing

it as conflicting we should see it as complementary. So we need to work with them together to ensure that we go deep and find out the extent to which the recommendations of the auditors are actually implemented.

The other organization that has come into purview as a result of the law is the Office of the Auditor General of the Federation. I don't know whether you know this but traditionally in Nigeria long before independence even, the major instrument of fighting corruption in the whole public sector was the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation working in collaboration with the Public Accounts Committee of the legislature. That instrument is still there in spite of the creation of new anticorruption agencies.

Now the NEITI Act recognizes its role by saying that we will also submit a report to him, to the auditor-general who will, after three months, produce an official report indicating the responses of government to the report and, more importantly what government has done to implement the recommendations of the report. So we also have to work with the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation. But of course the larger public we cannot relate with them directly. We have to relate with them through civil society organizations and through community-based organizations. One of the recipients of the oil revenue and the revenue from the mining sector is the local government, 74 local governments.

I think if you look at the figures supplied by the accountant general, they probably had something like 500 or something billion dollars, naira sorry, during the 2005 thing. I said there's a lot of money that goes into the local governments so we need to actually try and reach out, not directly but through civil society organizations to see views and work with them. So there are many, many, many areas. The thing is to work out the strategy for dealing with all of this and also a priority about which one comes first and so on.

MAKGETLA: As you try to build support among these different actors have there been any challenges that have arisen? For example you mentioned some concern with your presenting the report to the President and his council. Can you describe that and how you addressed it?

ASOBIE: *Yes. You know first of all there was a very strong civil society resistance. It had a point. The point they had was that there was nothing in the law from their own interpretation that compels us to present our report. First, that was their worry. First to the President and council before making it public. The law simply says, that section of the law says, NSWG will receive the report, send it to the national assembly, to auditor-general and then disseminate it to the public. That's what it says. As I said, earlier on we decided we needed to get the buy-in. So that was one issue we had to deal with. Does the law protect us or not?*

My answer to that is that you should read the law holistically, don't just take one provision. There is another provision of the law that says that you should make a report. First of all it begins with the statement that NEITI is an autonomous body reporting to the President and the national assembly, that's the beginning of the NEITI. But later on it also says that we will make two reports to the President and the national assembly. It doesn't say audit report, it says two reports about our activities. The first report it didn't indicate the contents, but the second report it said it must be accompanied by audited accounts of NEITI.

Now if the law stipulates that you must do the auditing of extractive industries within the first six months of the new year for the previous year. For example, in 2009 by June 2010 we should have released that report. The same report says

that within the year, we should submit a report to the President of its activities. Doesn't it suggest that actually one of these activities would be the audit report? Ok? So you can be too legalistic about it. But that was not the reason why we had to do that. We had to do that. But the fear of civil society, which I understood very well, was that they could then decide that the report had found too many things that were embarrassing and therefore we should not disseminate that. I think that was probably behind that. I must confess the matter came up.

We stated very clearly that no matter how embarrassing any report is, as long as it is a NEITI audit report, it has to be published as it is to the public. The body, the FEC (Federal Executive Council) understood and in fact even the argument in favor of NEITI's position had started among them before even I spoke. So they understood because fortunately they had also read the law and found that we had an absolute freedom. They also understood the wisdom of not ever interfering with NEITI's activities. So the experience for me was very encouraging.

In other words the idea came, but obviously they also understood that it couldn't happen. So the report is there, fully, without being tampered by anybody. So that was one challenge that we faced and we overcame it in a manner that was satisfactory to me.

MAKGETLA: Has there ever been pressure from any quarter on NEITI not to release the full extent of the information that it received?

ASOBIE: *None whatsoever, absolutely none.*

MAKGETLA: Ok. Perhaps then we can turn to some of the reforms that you described earlier, some of the key reforms that you saw as important changes that had happened under your tenure. One of them you mentioned was creating an attractive salary scale for the Secretariat as an important way to get people with the necessary skills. Can you sort of describe, sort of step-by-step, how you were able to make that a reality?

ASOBIE: *Yes, the very first thing of course is the Secretariat did some homework and submitted a number of salary scales to the board, to the NSWG and also made a recommendation. We looked at it and arrived at what we considered to be fairly good mix of what you wanted for the staff. That's number one. The second stage was to sell it to the President. Ok, we sought audience and received audience for June last year and among other things we presented the matter in principle without giving any figures and argued why we thought we should have a special salary scale and he approved. In the presence of the Minister of Finance, the President of Budget Office and so on.*

MAKGETLA: Can I ask, framing it in terms of principle, was that a way to ensure that it was more likely to be favorably received?

ASOBIE: *It was the most important thing to do really, to first agree on principle before you begin to suggest figures. He of course immediately reminded us that whatever was agreed had to pass through the normal process and ultimately would be put in the budget, otherwise it wouldn't be implemented. So the next thing was then to tackle the organization that was responsible for approving the figures and that was the National Salaries, Incomes, and Wages. So we engaged national salary and wages at the topmost level and convinced them, convinced them also about a submission. They themselves made the recommendation to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and also advised us to follow up with*

that and we did. Eventually the SGF, was reluctant, naturally was reluctant because it could send a very bad signal, particularly in a period of economic crisis to the other sectors to demand. But you know we had an advantage.

The advantage we had was we had no salary scale at all so we were not asking for improvement in pay. We were merely asking for a salary scale. We had none. If you didn't have a salary scale what would you be paying staff when DFID stopped paying, and they stopped paying in May? So the SGF saw our point and recommended to the President and the President finally approved. So we followed this step-by-step.

MAKGETLA: Were there any unforeseen obstacles in that process?

ASOBIE: *Naturally. There were delays. This journey started June last year and we got the approval only I think in July, August.*

MAKGETLA: And it was delayed just because you had to work with so many agencies or were there any reasons for them?

ASOBIE: *Well that was, obviously the fires went to fro between salaries and wages and secretary to the government. Naturally, I mean, I didn't see all the details about comments, but naturally civil servants would always raise issues about financial matters and so on and approvals. So yes, there are some issues. We had support at the highest level. I think that was what was important.*

MAKGETLA: You mentioned also that an important change was developing the Secretariat. Did that also include hiring the staff to work in the Secretariat?

ASOBIE: *Oh yes, yes. Again, that is another challenge. You know we haven't finished the process. We have advertised. We are in the process of short-listing and interviewing. Obviously I mean there is pressure. If you have a situation of very high unemployment there is pressure from all kinds of quarters about the need to, you know, make some concessions to some important individuals, naturally. I expected this. I anticipated this. I think the board was also in agreement that if we are to be called transparency, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, then obviously all our procedures should be transparent. It is our greatest defense against pressure. I do hope that it will carry through. We haven't finished the process but I hope it will carry through.*

The idea is there is a need to return to Nigeria as it was at the beginning. You know, because Nigeria has gone down in terms of its rating or its perception globally with respect to transparency, people forget that there was a time that Nigeria was very, very transparent. The example I've always used is my experience. When as a young man I left school, I was looking for a job. I hadn't gone to university. I was looking for a job with A level. I abandoned the job I was doing which was teaching and relocated to Lagos to look for a job.

All I needed to do and I didn't realize that until somebody told me all I needed to do was to go to Labor Exchange, which was part of Ministry of Labor and register my name and my qualifications and check once a week. That's all. I would check often. They'd give me a slip and say, there's vacancy, either in the private sector or the public sector. The first one was UAC. There was vacancy UAC. I went there and there was vacancy. They interviewed me and I got the job.

I then said I needed to change job to bigger pay. Naturally as a young man, my ambition was to work at Central Bank. I went back to, while I was still working,

and they said yes, there's vacancy at Central Bank. I went two days later and there was vacancy and I was interviewed and I got the job. I didn't need to see anybody at all. That was the position. That was as far back as 1965. You might say it was one-half a century ago. But more recently when I graduated from the university it was the same thing. My head of department had his preferred students, but there was an opening that was advertised. When I complained to the clerk in the office he said, "Ignore the head of department." The clerk said, "Ignore the head of the department, just apply." I applied, used other people as references and I was called and interviewed and I was taken. Irrespective of who the head of department thought. This was Nigeria.

That Nigeria can be recreated. For me that is actually the motivation. We can recreate Nigeria in our own small area. Also, my leadership training tells me that the answer lies within. If you want to make a change begin with yourself, begin where you are. Don't even begin to think about the larger, just let everybody do his own bit. So I do hope that my colleagues in NEITI will agree that it can be done, that you can actually recruit people in a transparent manner, and you get the best, and they will feel proud that they got it out of their own capability, not because somebody helped them.

MAKGETLA: So after you get the buy-in, if you help people understand what is possible, what are the actual steps that you did to make it a transparent process and to sort of shield against influence?

ASOBIE: *First of all we began with the process of hiring the human resource consultant, in fact consultants who prepared the job requirements, indicated the qualifications and the experience that was required. We then asked them to go a step further and actually do the advertisement, prepare the advertisement. I handled the advertisement. I handled it up to the short-listing before handing it back to NEITI. That's where it is now, it hasn't gone beyond that. When it comes to NEITI I do hope that the committee responsible—. We made sure that people didn't know who these consultants were, of course, otherwise there would be pressure on them and being human beings they might succumb.*

The next step will then be to ensure that the NEITI organs themselves perform well enough to also bring in a transparent process to the board and that the board will be sensible enough to approve a transparent process. It is a stage-by-stage thing. It is something that you have to at every stage hope that members will understand and leave the present and the past and build a new future. A new future can be built for Nigeria.

MAKGETLA: You've described the need to have people with the skills that will enable them to engage in these quite technically complex processes. Have there been any challenges in identifying people with those skills and what are the sort of talents that you're looking for amongst people that you hope to hire?

ASOBIE: *From the little information available to me because I'm not really at the center of the process, they have gotten a lot of applications, about 53,000 applications from Nigeria and abroad, not from Nigeria. From Nigeria and abroad, because we're not restricting the hiring to Nigeria. Again from the information I have, they are very highly qualified, highly experienced people who have applied. Look, if you just focus on Nigerians alone, there are very many competent Nigerians in and outside the country, scattered all over the place. It is not just people who are looking for jobs, it is also people who are already in a job but want to change jobs. So I know that there are people who are already in the oil industry, finance industry and so on, finance ministry, that are applying to that position. And*

people who were trained abroad who are also applying. Then somebody probably will apply from a foreign university—ok, so I think we are likely to get very qualified people. I don't think that is a problem really for me, that's not a major challenge.

The major challenge comes after the hiring. Let me tell you what I think is the most important problem that Nigeria faces. The corruption is a very big issue, I don't under rate it at all but I think a much more important issue is the willingness to actually do a day's job for a day's pay. I think that in the public service many people come to work and spend eight hours or more at their desks and do practically nothing. Not because they like to do so, but there are no specific articulation by the leadership of the organization about what they ought to achieve very day, every hour. They are just hired and told that you're a clerk or a technician, and you are left like that.

So every day you come to work and you just get confused, read files and go. Nothing happens. So the very first problem we are going to have is whether we are going to get—what the consultants did was only enough to hire people. It is not enough to get them to work. So we have already asked some other set of consultants to prepare for us the manual of job specifications for each position in that place. Ok, will we get managers that are able to really sit on them and then show that every day you achieve certain targets? That is the challenge. It is not an NEITI challenge, it is a Nigerian challenge really.

The reason why much of the budget is not implemented is this. There is work to be done, there is a budget, there is a plan. There is no specific itemization of what to do minute, hour-by-hour and there is no strong supervision to ensure that this is done. That is why money is left at the end of every year and it is not spent. So our problem really, frankly, is not money. It is the capacity to utilize the money to serve the Nigerian people.

I think underlying it all is leadership. We don't have the proper leadership. The mistake we make is when we talk about leadership we look at it in orthodox, traditional sense, transactional sense as that political leader that is elected. At the state level, local government level. We forget that there is leadership at every level and we don't look at it. How do leaders behave at the organizational level? How do they manage? How do they motivate? What do they really do? How did they try? What kind of environment did they create for workers, so on and so forth. If we look into that—research on that is not generally publicized or disseminated.

So a discussion about Nigerian problems, such discussions are usually superficial dealing with—we dismiss it with one word, political will, an EITI preferred term, do you think you really have the political will? When they think about it, do you think the President actually supports NEITI? The thing is much deeper than that. It's not the President's problem as far as I am concerned, it is us, it is me, it is the executive secretary. It is the directors in NEITI. They should be challenging, not the President. As long as the President doesn't interfere. The same thing applies to every organization EFCC, EITI, ICPC, every one of them.

So that is the mistake that we make in the anti corruption movement of thinking political will is not there. That's why EFCC is not interfering. It's not necessarily so. It may well be that in fact the people who are running the organization don't even believe in what they're doing; they don't think it is possible. They're not passionate about it, they're not committed about it. So no matter how much

political will there is or there is not, nothing really goes on there. So that's what I think.

MAKGETLA: So how do you find those people for an organization like NEITI, people who can play that strong managing role and who understand that imperative?

ASOBIE: *First of all, if you employ them and create these manuals I'm talking about you must train them. This training must be constant. Again it should not be the normal Nigerian training. You know when Nigerians talk about training, they put training in the budget. They don't really mean training. Permit me to be a little cynical. They don't really mean training, they mean money. The training that they value is training abroad because it involves per diem. The best training for staff and for management and for leadership should be done in situ, should be done in the organization. It should have built in it the procedure for monitoring the impact of the training on the organization. How do you put the lessons of the training into practice? There should be a report to that and a review from time to time. So the training is important.*

Again periodic meetings by the management are important to evaluate the targets, review the situation. But this requires a totally different level of organization than exists, than is operational. In leadership we have about five levels of organization. One is the autocratic type, that is the very first one, the pragmatic, the principled, and so on until we get the perspective that is more democratic. We are still operating at the autocratic level and it is reflected in the concept that we use. Executive governor, I'm sure you've seen that. I think Nigeria is the only place I hear that. Executive governor, executive secretary, chief executive. That creates the impression that this one man executes. That's not leadership. Leadership is about a group of people working together as a team. You're guiding, not really directing as such, but motivating everybody to work along with you.

So it is not just training the staff, it is also training the leaders, transformational leadership. Nigeria is ripe for a really big introduction of transformational leadership to see whether we can change the entire orientation. Part of the reason why we don't, we are not producing is because that leadership is not there, that's what I think. It is not just NEITI, that's what I think is all over the place.

MAKGETLA: When you look for those individuals who can occupy roles with the training that you described, are there any particular talents or personality types that you think are important to look out for in making that recruitment?

ASOBIE: *Sure, but I am not sure whether it is actually taken into consideration in this process because you have to know it before you apply it. I think research has revealed that intellect is important. That is to say what is called intelligence quotient is important, but even more important is emotional intelligence, the capacity to understand your emotions, the capacity to control your emotions, and the capacity to create good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues. For me that is the most important quality really, in not just the leader but in the staff. Because the capacity to work together is the most harmonious as a team, is the most important thing and it lies in emotional changes. I think this is what we lack actually. Most leaders lack it.*

One of the things you see in an organization is preoccupation with personal ego, personal dominance, personal power. That is what you see in most organizations in the country. That explains why it is very difficult for example in the public

service to see, for people to have access to those that govern them. They don't have access. So immediately they're elected or appointed, there is a big gap between the person appointed and those he is dealing with because there is no knowledge about what leadership is all about.

It is not just a management issue, it is also a governance issue. There is also some other problem that I don't think that we discuss publicly enough: the structure of governance of public agencies. I just realized it, even in the petroleum industry deal when I examined this critically, I saw the same problem already embedded in it and I've spoken out against it. You have a situation where you establish a board of directors and the chairman of the board is appointed usually in Nigeria by the President without consultation with anybody or sometimes in consultation with someone but he is appointed.

Then you have the so-called chief executive, also appointed by the President. Each reports directly to him. There you have a problem. You have a problem because it is difficult for them to resolve the issue of hierarchy. Secondly, the principle that you see here in NEITI, which is the multi-stakeholder principle, has not actually been put into practice in other organizations, even in the oil and gas industry, even in the petroleum industry.

What is that principle? The principle of having private sector, civil society, public sector working together almost on an equal basis, equal representation there. So that you have the people who relate to the people actually being at the hierarchal—if you look at the boards that are created on all the new agencies created in the petroleum industry, none of them reflects this structure. In other words, we still have a lot of work to do to sell the brand called EITI and apply. It is not just about openness and accountability, it is also about governance. That governance structure has not been accepted and I don't think EITI board has been pushing it hard enough.

MAKGETLA: How do you think you could begin to encourage others to take on that principle or that idea?

ASOBIE: *It is to first of all preach it, make people understand it, understand the utility of it, how it works, how it reduces conflict, and then see whether you can sell it to other people. Of course transparency itself is also important. Some people say it is impossible. But if you had let us say the executive council holds its meeting, not in camera but before the camera, the result would be different in two ways. One, some decisions that they make they would not make if they know that the public is watching them from all over the country. Two, some of the misunderstanding that the public has about how it operates would not exist because as it is they think that it is the President that dictates and directs. But you need to be there to know that there is a debate.*

I don't know what is preventing us in a democracy from time to time, even if it is not all the time, allowing people to sit in the gallery and watch the event. I think it would change a lot of things. But I think we can begin at the lower level, at the lower level that doesn't have some many security implications. We can begin at the level of—. That's why, when I became chairman one of the first issues that arose was would I allow observers, I said yes. I didn't see what the problem was. Come and observe.

It worked both ways in the sense that people then took away the minutes, at the base of the minutes they wrote some reports according to their own perception of what happened. That is one downside of it. But the upside of it is that nothing is

hidden about how decisions are made. I think that is a great advantage. People get to know that there is nothing hidden in what you are doing and it keeps everybody on the—. I learned that from the university actually. I used to be on the governing board of the university for quite a long time and the governing board itself also has subcommittees. One of the subcommittees operated an open system. That was the committee that dealt with promotion and appointment for academic staff. I sat on it for eight years. It allowed heads of departments and deans of faculty, sometimes the candidates themselves to come and observe, sit in the same room. The other one was closed, the council was closed.

What I found was that people behaved differently, the members of the governing board behave differently in the A&P (Appointments and Promotions Committee). They played to the public from the way they behaved in the governing council, which was closed. But I think the better decisions were taken at the A&P, at the Appointments and Promotions Committee. So I think frankly that gradually we should open up the process of decision-making. The secrecy does not help.

MAKGETLA: How do you appeal to colleagues who maybe aren't as comfortable with everything in the open and are maybe more concerned with the downsides of the process that things might get misrepresented?

ASOBIE: *Well I haven't had any problem with NEITI because that has been accepted. Because from the beginning I thought it was necessary to do that. But I know that in some organizations people would think it is mad to allow people to come and observe what you're doing. But I think if you are not really doing anything wrong, if you want to avoid doing things wrong, the best thing is to allow people to observe you. That's what I think. There are occasions where you may have to—for example, naturally if we are discussing staff matters, I cannot allow staff to stay there. For that period they go because I don't want people to now discuss things in order to please them. They come in later.*

MAKGETLA: Talking of sort of working with others and building this team, you mentioned earlier a culture of secrecy that exists amongst the bureaucracy. Are there any other challenges that you've had in dealing with this sort of bureaucracy and bureaucratic traditions or civil servants and how would you suggest for overcoming cases where perhaps they haven't bought into your policy agenda and might be resistant to change?

ASOBIE: *What I find in bureaucracy generally, I'm not talking about NEITI now, I'm talking about my interaction with the oil industry, the regulatory agencies, they are reluctant to come out openly and explain the difficulties they're having. Sometimes when you explain it to them openly they deny it and say there are no such difficulties. I'll just give you an example. DPR has tremendous difficulty, Department for Petroleum Resources, it has difficulty about funding, difficulty about capacity and so on. But each time you mention it, when the reports come out and mention it they deny. They say no, no, we have solved this problem. They haven't solved these problems, problems are there. So there is a fear that, I think there is something called official secrets act or so which they are—. Me, I come from the university so it is a different tradition all together. We have a different tradition.*

But that is hampering reform clearly. Even when you meet with them and ask them to articulate in more specific terms the problems they have which will present to government for them to solve they don't come back to you. Not that the problems have disappeared but somehow they don't want to be seen to be showing that there are problems. That's one area that we need to tackle. People

should fearlessly express their problems, their inadequacies and also get others who are willing to help them solve them. That's one.

The second one is, I think there are a lot of hierarchical problems existing. For example, let me not name the organization, but one of the organizations we deal with hadn't seen the audit report for 2005. We have tradition that the audit report must be presented to the board and that report is distributed fully to members of the board. One organization was sending a representative or sent a representative to that meeting where the report was distributed. That was in November 2008. By May, 2009, when I was trying to send a memo to them to dictate terms I called the board member to show the board member the memo which included a report of the agency that the board member was heading, the board member had not seen the report before. That is six months. When an investigation was conducted by the board member he found out that the person representing that board member reported to his immediate superior rather than to the board member. That's bureaucracy. You see, hierarchy is you report to your immediate superior but not to the person who sent you to the body. So that's another problem with that issue of hierarchy. The hierarchy has some good points in the sense that it makes sure that things are done orderly. But at the same time if you don't share information in that manner it creates problems.

Another one that is very, very damaging is the tendency to keep information. NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation) has vital information that the accountant-general's office ought to use, federal revenue service ought to use, even DPR ought to use. It is not passed to them. It is just kept in NNPC. So those ones are not able to do their job effectively. So the issue of revenue interface is important for us in NEITI and we are trying to tackle it by using electronic equipment to facilitate the sharing of information. We haven't succeeded. What we have succeeded in doing so far is to get them to meet more frequently, but that's not the solution. The solution is to interface electronically, pass all the information to all the agencies including NEITI.

For example, auditing we do annually, an audit takes something like six months, sometimes eight months. In fact the last one took from 2007 to 2008. It can be done much faster if the information they have is shared among all agencies on a monthly basis. You can do it easily. Oil companies can do the same thing. How much oil do you produce? You share it. So what we do at the end is just collecting information and reconciling them. That's what you're supposed to do. Not to start gathering information anew which is very laborious and sometimes we encounter records that are not electronically based, that are in files. Some files are missing and so on. That also creates problems for accuracy of the information we are gathering. So that is part of the traditional bureaucracy that we haven't overcome.

Even the whole things about committee meetings. I have a committee meeting of EITI board finance committee on ninth of September, it is electronic. We never meet in committees physically, never. It is impossible, practically impossible in terms of finances for us to come from all over to meet. So we meet electronically. This is not happening in our country. It is not. In fact, it is resisted, frankly. Write a memo through e-mail to your colleagues, nobody will respond. Nobody will respond. I ask and they say they didn't see it. They haven't even developed the habit of regularly reading e-mails and answering e-mails.

So there are so many things, we are lagging behind in so many things. These things are really hampering the process of doing the work of transparency.

- MAKGETLA: You mentioned several issues but do you have any strategies for dealing with some of them that have been successful in the past?
- ASOBIE: *Yes, as I said with respect to the revenue interflow or interface, we are working with some donor agencies to get the software that will enable us to link them electronically. We have also held meetings with the oil companies and regulatory agencies emphasizing the need to get this information we need for our audit reports on a monthly basis and transfer them to us electronically so that the next audit should be much easier rather than the ones we have done in the past.*
- So we held meetings, we've made proposals. It took quite some time for the agencies themselves to respond. That is a problem, yes.*
- MAKGETLA: What about these issues of hierarchy that you mentioned that can sometimes make it difficult for information to flow. Do you have any suggestions for how to address those issues when they arise?
- ASOBIE: *Take the issue that I raised particularly concerning NEITI. I would prefer that people appointed to positions on the board come personally rather than send representatives. Let me tell you why that is so. One disadvantage of a representative is a person who will not be able to speak authoritatively on behalf of the organization so you don't really have sufficient membership. Physically they are there, but in practice you don't have them. For example an NNPC has never attended a meeting. That is an NNPC group managing director, ever, since we were inaugurated. That is bad, terribly bad. A representative is normally sent, never says anything to the board. He doesn't know what to say and I suspect never reports. So in effect that oil company is not represented on our board. So I think the answer to that specific problem is that the person appointed must make the time to attend. There is no other solution.*
- The other one, the general point is that there should be constant meetings between the superiors and the juniors. I mentioned that earlier on, in every organization there should be at least monthly meetings relating to all your activities. Those who represent you can then report generally and everybody including the person in charge will hear what the problem is. I don't think that happens. I think they still have this and they see that you can take one man's decision and that is what it means, actually to have power and authority.*
- MAKGETLA: What are the carrots and sticks that NEITI can use to get people to send their actual representatives as opposed to an appointee or delegate?
- ASOBIE: *One method we've used is to agree on a timetable for a year at the beginning of the year so that everybody agrees on when to meet. As you know, if somebody is not even there when you are taking the time—That's one. The second one is that even though it is going to be time consuming, the leadership sometimes needs to face it, the individual agencies and impress it upon them. The third thing is to occasionally write letters requesting them. Sometimes also find them and emphasize the necessity for them to come and participate.*
- MAKGETLA: The work that NEITI does comes up in some cases I would imagine against quite powerful individuals and companies, people perhaps with an entrenched interest in the status quo. Have they ever sort of mounted resistance to the work that NEITI is doing and how have you managed to address that or deal with it?
- ASOBIE: *For now the areas we have been dealing with have not been too sensitive. Still we've had some noncooperation. For example, we didn't receive, as the auditors*

said in the 2005 audit, we didn't receive sufficient cooperation from Cavendish Oil and Express, those two companies. What the law requires is that if they don't cooperate we should impose some sanctions on them. But what we've done so far is to engage them in discussions to explain. In the last meeting we had on the 17th of August, Express was there. They denied the allegation that they didn't cooperate. They claimed that they actually sent in their templates. You know you cooperate through filling out templates and sending them. They volunteered to come to the Secretariat and identify the people to whom they gave it. Although the auditors were there and told them clearly that they didn't receive any templates from them.

So you try first to set it out at the level of discussion. If that doesn't work and they continue then you impose sanctions on them. That is how it can be dealt with. But the more difficult area will come when we are beginning to deal with the issue of disbursement for example. How much revenue did we get? How much revenue was worked into the federation account? How much money was distributed for the federation account to find out whether some people are withholding revenue? Then you are touching the most politically sensitive points of the country.

The question arises which is a question for every transparency integration agencies. Can you, do you have the capacity to deal with it personally. If, for example, the President, can you deal with him? Can you deal with the oil minister if the oil minister has a problem and so on. That issue is clearly put on the table. That means that before you get to that it is important for the organization to begin to hold discussions with them, to see the necessity for them to cooperate in getting this aspect of the work done.

Another area that civil society is pushing, which is correct also, that we should include in our auditing process is the issue of auditing the procurement procedure used for example in giving blocks, oil blocks to people. That again you are touching the most sensitive part of not just the hierarchy of leadership, but the entire political system. Because part of the political financing that we have in the country, it is tied up with the oil and gas industry. So again, I think that it should be necessary to begin to see how the political parties themselves can be engaged. Often we forget the political parties, particularly the ruling party. If you don't engage them really to begin to get their cooperation in pushing transparency, you are going to get a lot of resistance. We now begin to follow the money, track the money to how it is used. You begin to see some big names arising.

Once big names begin to arise, you have first what I may call the Nuhu Ribadu dilemma. The Nuhu Ribadu dilemma is they want to catch the big fish but the big fish can only be caught if the big guest fish cooperates. If the guest fish doesn't cooperate, you're wasting your time so you become selective.

Then catch only those big fish, that the biggest fish can afford to close its eyes to or which will not mind if the biggest fish is caught. That is the dilemma. So if you want to avoid that dilemma it is better to be proactive about it and begin to see that's where the political will really comes in. We want to see where the political will can be, real political will, not individual will. The will of the ruling political party. Can they be faithful to the manifesto? Because the manifesto contains those things we are really fighting but nobody really talks about the manifesto in the country.

I think ultimately frankly, because I don't think that anybody that is habituated to corruption will willingly abandon the habit. Ultimately it is mobilizing the people. That means that not NEITI now, civil society has to go back, Nigerian civil society has to go back to the strategies used by civil society during the fight for independence and immediately after. What did civil society do in those days? There was civil society, there was no core civil society but they existed. There were organizations that were not strictly political organizations that were interested in development. At that time it was political development they were interested in. What did they do?

For a trade union to go on strike in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they first had to do very intimate consultation with major political parties that were in opposition to the colonial master at that time NCNC (National Council of Nigerian Citizens) and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and get their support. So that if they came under the hammer of the colonial government they will get support at the higher level. That was what was what happened before independence and immediately after independence.

Also when the action group became the main opposition party, many progressive civil society organizations had an informal alliance with that organization in order to be able to effectively raise the agitation at the higher political level against the ruling party. The problem we have today is that particularly the donors are insisting that civil society is nonpartisan. That's number one. Define nonpartisan to mean the willingness to work with government. It's ironic. Ok, you're nonpartisan but you must show willingness to work with the government. So that's one good thing about you civil society. And I ask the opposite, what will happen? If you are going to be effective, you are going to effectively fight corruption and promote transparency; first you must inject the fight into the political arena. You must link it with what I call electoral punishment. That is to say, if you are corrupt, then you will be punished electorally.

How do you get people punished electorally? First you must have viable opposition parties. By that I mean opposition parties that fairly regard themselves as alternative governments, which means that they have ministers, they have cabinets. They do research and provide point-to-point alternative programs on every issue and have spokesmen for them. So there are shadow ministers that deal with that. Then they deliberately go out of their way to actually link up with civil society organizations that provide the base, political base, political support for themselves. That is the way to go. The way we are going of so-called independent nonpartisan civil society, actually doing a transformation is not going to work. It won't work. Because ultimately that is what will bring about change. If the ruling party knows that if it doesn't change, it doesn't really affect positive reform, it can be elected out of office. On that basis, then there will be a change. But if it knows that there is no alternative really, why would they develop a political role, they'll just not listen to anybody. So I think the general strategy we are adopting is the wrong strategy.

MAKGETLA: You said that an organization trying to fulfill this role will need the necessary capacity to engage in this manner. As you're actually developing your own organization to do this, what do you see as the important capacities?

ASOBIE: *I didn't quite get that.*

MAKGETLA: You said that an organization in order to play this role of proactively engaging people at the top needs to have the necessary capacity to take on such a big

fish. What would you say as you're building your own organization developing its capacities are the key resources of the organization that will enable it—?

ASOBIE: *I am not quite sure it is wise to answer that question because that is a question that touches our strategy, really. There is a strategy that can be used by NEITI, a strategy that I can describe only generally. I cannot go into details about this. [interruption – end of file two.]*

MAKGETLA: So go ahead.

ASOBIE: *The strategy of building support for the NEITI process from below. If you extend it to other agencies, building support for anticorruption from below, what is happening now is even though there is nothing to engage people at the local government and community levels, it is not the major strategy. The major strategy in fighting corruption in Nigeria is enforcement. I described it actually as arrest and either jail or bail. That is what the strategy is. That is what is a popular strategy. That is what made (Nuhu) Ribadu popular. It cannot be sustained. What can be sustained is what may be called democratic institutionalization strategy. That is to say you begin to build support for promoting revenue and expenditure transparency at the most basic level. People actually participate in determining their priorities on what should go into the government at the level of the district, at the level of the local government.*

Then if they succeed in doing that they follow up to see whether those priorities are actually reflected in the budget and whether they're implemented. Inevitably that will push you into saying if you don't agree to our priorities, or if you do but you don't implement the priorities, then you have no chance of going back next time. Inevitably and logically you cannot start by saying I want to determine priorities, I want to ensure that priorities are implemented. If they're not implemented nothing happens. Something should happen. But as I said, it is easier to begin to do it at—better to not be seen as a threat immediately at the higher level. It will simply be seen as an attempt to ensure that what is released by federal government actually has some impact on the ground.

They will immediately begin to see the advantage because where it succeeds they then seen the opportunity of returning the people in power. So you begin at that level where it is not seen as a threat to the big fish. It is only when you have built up enough momentum and support at that level that you become untouchable when you begin to challenge the big fish. You can't challenge the big fish without having a base.

MAKGETLA: Ok. As we begin to wrap up I'd like to ask you if there is anything within your personal background or personal management style that you think has been important to your ability to initiate these reforms?

ASOBIE: *I think basically it is the training that was not formal. If you like, informal training. One, I think I was lucky to go to a radical school after my first degree and the London School of Economics is a radical school. There was a lot of movement, including anticorruption movement. I remember when I went to London School, Professor (Geoffrey) Goodwin I think called a meeting asking each graduate student, to each graduate student what were you going to do in your research project.*

I said my ambition is to liberate South Africa. That was what I answered. I meant it. It is what I thought I should do. That was the atmosphere that was created by the school that I attended. But also coming home, I think I was lucky to be given

an opportunity to lead a radical organization. I think that ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) is one of the most radical organizations in the country. Also a radical organization that is made up of intellectuals. So to have been able to lead the organization during one of the most difficult times when you had a very deadly military regime, got sacked for two years, wasn't having a—and survived. That was also very good training. Training first of all in sacrifice and training in leadership. I think that was the most important training I had. If I didn't have opportunity to lead Transparency in Nigeria, but I led Transparency in Nigeria mainly because I had been ASUU president and that was the reason.

Then again, just about the time of my retirement I then underwent this transparency leadership training at UNDP which incidentally was devised mainly to fight HIV and AIDS. That was the mission the leadership was focused. When we were invited in 2006 by UNDP as deans of faculties in different universities and the matter was presented to us in that manner I was one of those that insisted it was a tool that can be used more generally than just for focusing on HIV and AIDS. My argument was that it should not be attractive to students unless it could make impact on their individual lives beyond HIV and AIDS in the universities.

So that training also, for me, first formal training on leadership was very, very useful and very influential in my thinking about how things can be done.

MAKGETLA: Some people have spoken about the importance for a leader to have a vision or a common narrative around which to mobilize people. How important would you say that has been in your experience and what advice would you have for others to think about how to develop that?

ASOBIE: *It is very important to be very optimistic about the possibility of change. If you don't have that then you might as well forget about reform, because surrounding you will be all kinds of pessimists about things that are possible and things that are not possible. So if you have a very exaggerated notion of what is possible that is number one. Sometimes even an unrealistic notion in a traditional perspective about what is possible.*

Then you must also be very clear about where you think the organization is going and where you want to take the organization. There are many contending visions for any organization. There are some people who think that NEITI should just be concerned with producing reports, disseminating them and so on. Other activities, even when they are stipulated in the law, are too ambitious to achieve. You must believe that at the heart of everything you do is human welfare. For me that is the most important vision for the mental vision. If you believe that nothing is important unless it advances your own welfare, it will actually influence you in the degree of social commitment and also the degree of passion you bring. Without passion and social commitment you cannot achieve your vision.

MAKGETLA: Some leaders have spoken of the difficulty they find in identifying different options, of ways to work because they may be too busy to gather that information themselves. Where have you gone to for sort of information on options about these possibilities? Do you rely on your own instincts? Are there any institutions you turn to? Where do you seek that?

ASOBIE: *I think to begin with one of the greatest problems a leader has is the capacity to withdraw and reflect. If you get involved in day-to-day activities you hardly have time to reflect and re-think on what you are doing. Sometimes it is necessary, not sometimes, always, it is necessary to periodically have time to withdraw from*

people, from events and do some deep reflection about where the organization is going, what the challenges are and how to tackle them. Right now, really, that's what I am doing. I am not going to the office for quite some time. I am doing a lot of reflection on that.

On doing that, I also find that doing a lot of reading is part of it. Nowadays there is a lot of literature really about how such challenges can be faced, there is a lot both in books and on the internet. So I am doing a lot of reading, I'm doing a lot of reflection. I am also doing a lot of talking with people about what do you think, how do you think we should go about it and so on.

MAKGETLA: This program is designed to help leaders share their experiences about innovations they've begun or challenges that they've encountered in building institutions and advancing reforms. Is there anything that you think that we've missed or that you'd like to add about that?

ASOBIE: *Yes. I think that institution building is key to reform but you must always remember that institutions are run by human beings. So the ability to understand human beings is important. Not only human beings in their individual psychology but also human beings in relationship with one another and relationship with their social environment. The ability to understand that social context within which you are put is important. There are certain peculiarities of the Nigerian socio-economic system that one must take into account and try and situate your organization within that. I have alluded to some of them. You must remember the political context of Nigeria is such that there are always, always two components of any program or any plan in our country. One may be called the latent component, the other is the manifest. What is proclaimed is the manifest. What is not proclaimed is the latent. I see tension between the two all the time.*

The latent is very deeply linked with personal ambitions, personal agenda, parochial agenda. The manifest is free, in universalistic terms in patriotic terms and so on. That's one dimension of the political contest you're operating. Consequently when a leader comes up and poses a reform agenda including anticorruption agenda, he is not targeting everybody, he is using it as an instrument for legitimacy for himself and his regime and at the same time using it also as an instrument for disadvantaging the opposition. That is the history of Nigeria. It doesn't matter which regime it is, that is the history. You must understand that. So you must maneuver within that slippery environment.

What you should ask for is for independence to operate and you must operate very carefully within that space that you are given. That's one dimension of the political context of the country. The other dimension is the social dimension, or if you like the social-cultural dimension.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society that is overlaid by a network of petroleum client relationships. Consequently what constitutes fighting corruption for one group is seen as witch hunting by another group, all the time. Because there are so many human beings through this network that benefit from corruption. So there is a limit through which you can pursue an agenda that they think everybody can frame. It becomes exceptionally necessary for you to be focused in terms of that environment. You must also be conscious of the nature of the government, the way in which there is hardly any meaningful private sector.

The private sector is heavily dependent and integrated into the public sector. So while you are dealing with somebody thinking that you are dealing with private sector there is behind that private sector a public face that may show up at any

point in time. The point I'm really making is the necessity for the leader to be, to read the environment correctly in order to be able to fit in the strategies, trying to formulate within the political context, within that socio-economic environment.

MAKGETLA: Thank you very much for your thoughts and your time.