



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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**Interviewee:**

**Leslye Obiora**

**Interviewer:**

**Itumeleng Makgetla**

**Date of Interview:**

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**Location:**

**Telephone interview - interviewee located in  
Tucson, Arizona**

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MAKGETLA: My name is Tumi Makgetla, it is the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 2009. I am having a recorded conversation with Professor Leslye Obiora who is currently at the University of Arizona in Tucson and who was formerly a cabinet minister in the federal government of Nigeria in the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development from 2006 to 2007. Thank you very much for joining us and being part of this set of interviews.

OBIORA: *Thank you very much.*

MAKGETLA: Before we get started can I just confirm that firstly you understand that this is a voluntary interview and you consent to that.

OBIORA: *Certainly, this is a voluntary interview and I consent to it.*

MAKGETLA: Also that you understand that this is a recorded conversation.

OBIORA: *Yes, I do understand that this is a recorded conversation.*

MAKGETLA: Thank you very much. Perhaps we can begin with your giving us a brief overview of your career and how you came to be a minister at the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development.

OBIORA: *I'm not sure where to start but suffice it to say that I basically have been a lawyer and a law professor for most of my career. I graduated from law school from the University of Nigeria in 1984 and then did my National Youth Service Corps which is a mandatory youth service to motivate recent graduates to cultivate a service orientation and I guess the government had primarily instituted the program to reinforce national integration and whatever other values they want to promote. Subsequently, I worked briefly for a law firm, then proceeded to Yale Law School for my Master's Degree in 1987 and went from there to Stanford Law School to get my Ph.D. equivalent in law.*

*I started teaching at Indiana University in 1992 and went from there to the University of Arizona in 1997. And between those two appointments I had some visits at other institutions. Since joining the University of Arizona, I have also had visits at various other places. I also received Fellowships, including awards from the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton and from the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences which I had to decline because I was going to Yale to be the Coca-Cola World Visiting Faculty.*

*I've also been the Gladstein Human Rights Professor at the University of Connecticut which is a campus-wide Chair and done other interesting things. In 2004, actually prior to 2004, in 1999 I received an unsolicited offer from the World Bank to manage their standalone Gender and Law Program. I agreed to do that for a year. In the process of that I developed a framework that I thought would be an effective way to harness the human rights agenda as an empowerment strategy for women. The culmination of my term at the World Bank was convening a Ministerial Conference that featured ministers from the countries that were in the portfolio I anchored, all of which were African countries as the Program was quartered in the Africa Region of the Bank. Those who could not join us in person were able to join us via video conference.*

*True to prediction, the Bank had not done much with the model that I had proposed, but the keynote speaker at the conference was Fazle Abed who was*

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*the founder of BRAC and he had encouraged me to do something with the model even if the bank wasn't going to follow up on it.*

*In 2001, I was encouraged to establish the Institute for Research on African Woman and Culture. This was supposed to be a vehicle to test run the model. In 2004, I began by going back to Oguta, which is a town in southeastern Nigeria which is my hometown to pilot the initiative, not just as a social experiment, but also a learning experience. I wanted to see if indeed the framework would turn out in reality the way I had envisaged. The idea was basically just leveraging indigenous resources and trying to use that as a way to construe capital much more broadly so that it is not just the narrow focus on finances that leaves Africa always hamstrung but looking at social, cultural and intellectual capital as well as other forms of assets, much of which abound in these places and trying to figure out creative ways to bring them to bear on a gender empowerment project.*

*So for instance if you wanted to use the human rights agenda as an anchor, to promote the well being of women and you want to address their right to education, you don't have to be crippled by the fact that you do not have the resources to parachute in instructors that have the kind of credentials that appeal to you from never-never land. You can just look to see who has the basic minimum skill to be able to serve as a trainer for these women. And in a community like Oguta, we have teachers and we have retired teachers and we even have high school students if it was about adult literacy and numeracy who we could deploy to help facilitate the objectives. Also with regards to basic health care, we have health workers in the community to whom we could appeal to partner with us and volunteer their services. That is how we tried to use the five arms of the human rights agenda, namely the civil, political, social, economic and the cultural and just figure out what would constitute a threshold minimum of those rights and relatively look to see what resources were in the community we could work with to safeguard these for the women with whom we were working.*

*This was a project that fortunately worked out well with my academic calendar. Since I have the summers to write and do research, this was empirical research and from 2004 onwards, I started going back to Nigeria to first of all direct this program and then to follow up on it. In 2005 when I returned to Nigeria, part of the preliminary effort that we had made and the findings from that pointed to some very interesting opportunities to also build up an arm of the program which would promote the growth of indigenous philanthropy. So for instance, in every community again, the whole notion of a "Big Man" that has been made much of by anthropologists and even political theorists who write about patronage and clientele systems, the challenge was to revisit the relevance of these forces in these communities and to look at what redeeming qualities they have that could be harnessed to help recuperate development agendas.*

*With the lack of social services and infrastructure that defines our contemporary realities in Nigeria, in any community considerably you have that person or so-called "Big Man" who is already doing a lot of good turn for whatever reasons and paying school fees and providing bore-holes or pipe-borne water and filling the gaps that abound again from the challenges of government in these communities. So we felt that it was important to try to identify some of these key players and talk to them about the work they were doing for their community and about how they could organize and grow their giving in a way that would make it much more strategic and much more productive and long lasting.*

*So within that context the Institute for Research and African Women, Children and Culture (IRAWCC) we had a spin off program, which we called Stimulating*

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*Indigenous Philanthropy in Nigeria, SPIN. We hosted a Leadership Forum under the auspices of SPIN in 2005 May; it was supposed to be a three-module leadership forum, so the module two, we had it in 2006, and module three was supposed to follow in 2007. Incidentally the module two took place, I believe it was the first week of June, or maybe the second week of June 8 through the 10<sup>th</sup> of 2006, and again Fazle Abed [was our keynote speaker. That leadership forum which was very well received and was really a framework or a platform for people from across the sectors, the public, the private and the philanthropic sectors to dialogue and try to figure out a way forward, in terms of developing indigenous philanthropy and the incidence of course.*

*On or around the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2006, I received a call from a journalist who wanted to do a follow-up coverage on the conference. Apparently he had participated at the conference and they had covered it initially but he said that they wanted to do additional follow ups and he asked if I had pictures from the conference. I said I didn't have the pictures in an electronic version, that I had some hard copies because I was literally driving back from the airport where I dropped off my research assistant, Raphael Parker, who was an NYU law student who had come to work with me; he had just left to attend his sister's wedding in Israel and I said that when he comes back I'll have the electronic file with the pictures that I could transmit via email. In the alternative, I said that I was in Lagos then and that I will be in Abuja at the end of June and then I could give him the hard copy if Raphael was not back yet.*

*So he said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in Lagos and I'll be in Abuja the end of June." He said, "Are you not the one who has just been nominated Minister?" I said, "What?" He said, "There has just been a news flash that you have been nominated a minister by the President." I said, "You must be very wrong because that's not who I am, I'm just a professor of law. I'm here to do research for the summer and I will see you at the end of the month."*

*I was headed to have a meeting with Gamaliel Onosode who had been part of our SPIN network and was going to interview him as part of the project; he had been a Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He has held very strategic positions in the private sector as well and I think had been the chair of the board of trustees for the University of Ibadan which was doing some innovative work drawing on philanthropic initiatives to support education; he was also doing some interesting work on his own in terms of indigenous giving. I wanted to talk to him about his respective roles from the perspective of him wanting to replicate the work we were doing in Oguta in his hometown as well as the role he was playing in the reinvigoration of the University of Ibadan.*

*Unable to make sense of the conversation with the journalist, but shocked nonetheless, I went to the meeting had been scheduled. By the time I got there I was sufficiently disconcerted from the conversation that just sounded so bizarre that he asked if I was okay. I said "yes, I'm sorry, I'm a bit shaken, but I just had this weird conversation with this journalist who said that he saw a news flash that I had been nominated a minister. I mean what could they be thinking? Is that the way things happen in this country? Nobody consulted with me, nobody asked me. Could it be true?"*

*So he laughed. He said, "well I guess it could be true. This is Nigeria, anything can happen. Perhaps to allay your concern, perhaps we should turn on the TV to see if there is anything in the news about that." We turned on the TV, there was nothing. We managed to have our interview. He also tried to allay my concerns and encourage me that, "What is the worse scenario, if it turned out that it was*

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*true, what would I do?" I said that I would abscond. And he said, "No you would not because this is your country, obviously you love it very much from the work you are doing and this would be an opportunity to serve."*

*I left him and I went to the Ford Foundation, which was where I was transcribing proceedings from the leadership forum. I walked in there, instead of working I packed up my stuff to leave. I had to explain to the director, Dr. Adhiambo Odaga that I had to leave because I was again quite disconcerted from the call that I had received and that I wasn't really sure what was going on. Dr. Odaga sat me down and said, "You can take a deep breath, what's the worst case scenario? This is your country. What are your concerns? Even if you were made Minister of Sports or Minister for what you don't know, we'd all rally around you and support you because we need people like you to do the work."*

*At any rate I called it a day, returned to the house, turned off my phone and went to sleep at about 2pm. I just refused to turn on my phone. In the dead of the night I woke up and turned back my phone and I don't know if you are familiar with the early generation cell phones in Nigeria, the way that text messages come in, it is almost like a buzz from space. So it comes zooming in, zooming in, once I turned on my phone and it was cluttered with all sorts of text messages, many of which were from my brother-in-law who said I must call him no matter when I received the message. So I panicked, I thought something was wrong with the family. About 3 a.m. I called my brother-in-law. He picked up this call and he said, "You must leave for Abuja on the first flight this morning."*

*I said, "Why?" He said, "Because we've just received a call that you're wanted in Abuja and the decisive order was from my auntie Angela Lucas whom everybody in the family respects a lot. He told me my auntie wanted me to do that. And that I must do that out of deference even if it was just to figure out what was going on. He said you must come to Abuja, no questions asked and she'll be there. I said, "I don't have airfare—I mean I have no plans for any of that stuff, I don't know what you people are talking about." He insisted, "I've been instructed to get you your ticket and I'm coming over to pick you up." I said, "No, the flight is about 7 a.m., we have to leave at 5 a.m.? I can't have you leave from VGC and jeopardize your life!..."*

*The long and short of it is that he eventually got me to agree that I would leave later that morning. He came and facilitated the trip, took me to the airport. By the time I got to the airport I ran into people I knew who were looking at me strangely. One of them, Chidi Odinkalu who worked for the Soros Foundation actually expressed disappointment that I was at risk of defecting to the government. A classmate, Obinna Onyearu, who graduated with me from UNN in 1984 showed me a newspaper, a publication that spelled my name incorrectly. I said, that can't be me, that must be somebody else. I don't know what this brouhaha is all about. At any rate by the time I got into Abuja it was obvious that that was me.*

*I was taken to the House of Assembly and eventually met the President who explained to me that he saw my resume and that he thought that I was the right person to do the work. He still wasn't sure what my portfolio would be. I said, can we really talk about the fact that all my career has been in law and quite frankly in the ivory tower. I have not been back to Nigeria since 1991 when I went to do field work in preparation for my doctorate dissertation. Between 1991 and 2004 I had actually not returned to Nigeria but for two weeks in 2000 when I went for my sister's wedding. So I'm really not the right person to do this. I don't know the country well and blah, blah, blah.*

*He said, "Well, out of 150 million people you have been called to serve. Look me in the face and tell me you would decline that invitation." I said, "I would be honored to give it my best shot and but what portfolio would I have?" The rumor mill speculated that I would be Minister for Education and I thought "education, sure, I guess, I can try to reach out to my network in academia and figure out who can come and help me."*

*He said, "Your clearing will be this week." I said, "You mean my hearing?" He said, "Your clearing." I said, "Is that it? Is it hearing or clearing?" He said, "Your clearing." I may have been secretly hoping that the National Assembly Hearing would go awry and that I'd get off the hook without a confirmation, but President Obasanjo was so sure of my confirmation that he suggested the hearing was more perfunctory and functionally a formality to clear my appointment. I thought, "oh, boy; I guess this is it!..." The Senate President was Ken Nnamani and it was like an out-of-body experience when it ended up with a relatively rapid turnaround. My aunt who had been scandalized since I went grung thought her first order of call was to change my closet and she opted to put together African outfits for me and blah, blah, blah. I had my swearing in and assumed office. I actually was floored when I took the oath of office and it turned out being minister for what used to be called Solid Mineral Development. Jokes aside, I had not given any thought to what constituted solid minerals, let alone solid mineral development. And I thought what in the world is solid mineral development.*

*I was reassured I'd been a quick learner and that I'd do just well. That's how it started. The wonderful thing was the incredible good will I had in Nigeria across the board. The moment I was sworn in everybody ran and came to me and said, "We want you to succeed." Here are the things you will do, etc.. Of course with a perpetual headache I kept just wondering the best way, reminded of the things like, the best way to eat an elephant is bite by bite, etc.. I just was trying to figure out the best way to get involved.*

*By the time after my first initial experience at the ministry I realized what was sorely lacking were systems and processes. So checks and balances against excesses like corruption that we try to essentialize as if innate or natural to Africa. So for instance, I noticed an interesting pattern that once I was looking at files that I was supposed to treat and realizing that critical pages were missing or realizing that when I needed a file that had some substance that was implicated in some contentious issue, that the file would just of its own accord develop legs and flee. I figured, well thank God I come from a worldview being Nigerian where we are not afraid of divination and I thought, well if these files will be developing wings or legs to flee of their own accord, I just should figure out a way to fight them on their own terms.*

*So I figured that the thing to do then would be just to try and get some better understanding of what it would take to arrest some of those problems that I thought were quite necessary, yes, quite containable. So I invited KPMG which is the premier management consulting firm in Nigeria to come and do some kind of a diagnostic for me as to what some of the issues are and how to deal with them.*

*They came up with a business plan that essentially was going to help me pipeline a kind of route for the institution that I was poised to build. The other challenge then was that since my prior to my appointment the budget had already been approved for the year and core projects had already been allocated, there was no line item for some of the work that I thought was very, very critical, even as starting point. Rather than allow myself be any more dispirited and working for a*

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*President who was the closest experience I'd had to a "soccer mom," retreat was not an option and I simply had to forge along. This meant that I had to find a way to celebrate my own challenges as opportunities and call on my own emerging skills as a fundraiser to go pan-handling among richer government ministries or parastatal, development partners and private sector funding prospects. Fortunately the work I had done with SPIN came in useful because you may recall that it was within the same week, barely within a week of our concluding SPIN that this happened and some of the stakeholders that came to SPIN were high-networth persons, industry captains, members of the diplomatic community and the donor community.*

*So it was relatively easy for me to reach out to agencies such as the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) or the Canadian government and the like, you know. Actually the Canadian government turned out to be one of my greatest supporters. And David Angell who was the High Commissioner then was very, very helpful to me as I was planning SPIN and was giving me ideas because apparently philanthropy was high on their own development agenda; in light of the Millennium Development Goals they had prioritized to try and help stimulate the growth of philanthropy as well.*

*Fortunately, Canada happens to be the premier mining destination and they put their thinking cap on as to how to help me try to attract the kind of foreign direct investment that I was looking to enlist from Canada. But to be able to do any of that, to be able to recuperate some credibility for a country that has been quite beleaguered and frankly had more than its fair share of bad press, I also had to do my own work cut out for me in terms of creating an enabling environment that would inspire and deserve investors' confidence. There is just no way you can in any good conscience or responsibly invite investors to come and invest in a sector where at the very least, little things like appropriate and reliable documentation was not guaranteed. So making the argument then to the UNDP, they agreed to fund the work that KPMG was going to do for me in terms of just providing the basis for the reforms that would follow to really have solid ground.*

*KPMG moved in sixteen of their top staff in-house with me. Unfortunately not having been in Nigeria for a while and not really being a politician, and being who I am, this was like just going into the lion's den. I took on the lion eye ball to eye ball and it did not go down too well with the civil service bureaucrats who were the ones that thought that they stood to lose the most. Regrettably a lot of the patterns in Nigeria just made for self-reproduction of some of the practices that we all decry. So for instance the whole idea of appointing permanent secretaries was as if it was a way of saying thanks for your service; they often appoint them in the twilight of their career. For example, some persons are appointed Permanent Secretary three or four months to their retirement. It is no surprise that some of their attitudes are that they are just there to build up some kind of nest with which to retire and have some financial cushion. Our commitment to longer-term objectives is almost secondary.*

*So I had an unfortunate incident. I had three permanent secretaries in less than a year. Part of it was just me saying listen, I'm in this, I forfeited my salary to do this, this is service for me in every sense of the word and I need to work with people whose perspective approaches this stuff in line with mine. You can rest assured that the civil service bureaucrats that assumed that they were the ones that were being undone by KPMG just kept wrestling and wrestling. I was basically forced to blink at some of the crazy-making dynamics for the most part; some of intrigues were eclipsed in the sense that my obligation to multitask and do all that was required to capitalize or reintegrate this moribund sector that was*

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*actually a very high potential sector that had been identified as a strategic sector by the government, meant that I didn't really, I mean I was too preoccupied to be bogged down by the mundanities. I figured that's what comes with the territory, especially since I was not an administrator. I had to outsource worry for the things that you find in a cesspool to people who have trained eyes to deal with them and that's what KPMG was being paid for by UNDP to do for me.*

*So I then focused on trying to get the Mining Bill which had been stuck in legislature for several years before I came. When I was sworn in President Obasanjo emphasized two things. He said to me, "the mining bill, I would love for this administration to be able to have it under their belts before the end of the administration and also foreign direct investment." Of course without the mining bill, which provides the backdrop for establishing the rule of law and the kind of enabling environment, you can't really get into any fierce competition with investors. So between you know holding watching briefs over the legislator's shoulders and sitting in the public gallery during the legislative sessions and all sorts of creative but laborious modes of expressing my importunity and reaching out to the law makers some of whom had drawn daggers with my boss the President and engaging in extensive diplomacy and lobbying all coupled with traveling a lot to mining destinations to secure the buy-in of key actors in the mining arena and also to participate in important conferences, I pretty much had my work cut out for me.*

*I was the most sleep deprived I've been in my life. But sometime around the end of September when I had the opportunity to catch my breath, I was able to look more into what was going on in the ministry. I remember my Director for Finance and Administration coming to me and basically trying to encourage me to let him, and as he put it "people from the south [of the country] take care of me." Because they were concerned that I was working too hard and at the end of the day this will be a thankless job. To him, there are ways that you could really make it a win-win situation, and that has been the tradition. It took me a while to decipher or decode what he was saying.*

*He said everybody knows you are above reproach, but you must have family members and we have these small contracts to which they are welcome [Indecipherable][Time 00: 32:52] and we have ways that we can at least take care of issues for you even as you're chasing the higher things. I said, I don't understand what you're talking about. He brought some documentation to show me the votes that we had for budget disbursement and some votes he suggested would be ideal deal for some of these lifestyle options. I was listening to him but I was also looking at those financial records that he had placed in front of me, which interestingly was the first time I had seen the financial records of the ministry. That's not a commentary on my own irresponsibility or lack of interest, but the way things are structured as though Cabinet Minister I am not the Chief Accounting Officer of the Ministry, the Permanent Secretary is. Having outsourced everyday management to the KPMG people to collaborate with the ministry people, I figured that in the short time that I had to I guess to play God which was effectively what I was being asked to do given the compelling obligations that were placed on my plate in the short time before the end of the administration, —I could focus on the much more strategic stuff and everyday management stuff could be done by other people.*

*But looking at the documentation this guy had put in front of me, we may have met on the first of October or shortly thereafter and he had two sets of records. One of them had the ministry's budget reconciled by September 30<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>*

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*which was the last Friday in September in 2006. Then the other one reflected accounting of the balances as of October 4<sup>th</sup>.*

*Because of the grave discrepancies between the figures that were given to me, I said, "Wait a second, the first one was done on a Friday, the last Friday in October, and October 1 is our day of independence which means that there was no work on October 1, or the Monday following that since Oct 1 fell on a weekend, which then meant that October 4<sup>th</sup> was the next business day after this other reconciliation. How come? How can you reconcile, it just doesn't make sense. How come there are these grave discrepancies between the two figures?"*

*He took a look at it and he said, "Oh, I think I'm giving you the wrong document, let me quickly go and get the right stuff." He nervously left my office. Being a trained attorney who knows about demeanor and body language, I summoned someone from KPMG, and I said, I just saw this document that is actually quite phenomenal, can you explain it to me? The KPMG people said to me, "Oh Honorable Minister, we didn't want to upset you, we just figured that we would work hard on other things and that gradually we would win the confidence of these civil service bureaucrats, especially the director and the finance administration people because they have not been cooperating at all. They have not shown us your books since we've been here." I was livid with rage.*

*I said, "Why, that was one of the main reasons why I brought you. I don't want this level of indiscretion under my watch. In the event that you had not seen that, you should have brought it to my attention." They said they didn't want to engender antagonism between them and so on and so forth. Anyway, that was the first tip of a hat that something was just horribly wrong. Of course I petitioned to the President that I wanted an investigation and all that stuff.*

*There was some backlash and hostility from my immediate predecessor who assumed that KPMG's intervention was supposed to imply a veiled audit of past administrations of the ministry, including her tenure. I had no interest in a retrospection. The least I cared for was some reasonable knowledge and record of what I inherited and some frame of reference to mark the status of things at the inception, during the course, and at the end of my tenure.*

*What beat me was they managed to lose perspective, blow the motive out of proportion to the point of justifying all sorts of obscurantism and witchhunt! I guess in Nigeria all that gets categorized as political intrigues and it reinforced the madness of those civil service staff who were out to undermine what we were doing. Even substantially, the cleaning up of the mining licenses and trying to reclaim some of our assets that had been awarded that were lying fallow and all the work that that involved and every step of the way, we were fought. Of course intrinsic in every reform is that you get resistance. So it was one form of resistance after the other as we made our way. But, I'm one of those naïve ones who believe in God and with gratitude to God we managed to frankly just do an incredible job in the short time that we had.*

*I vividly recall on one of my trips to Canada with David Angell going to I forget the agency in Canada that has oversight for overseas investment and they had said that they were coming to Nigeria to work with the oil sector, that they were going to have a conference in February. And I said, "And the mining sector?" Well they said, the mining sector has not really been on our radar screen because Nigeria has not really been known for its mining, but the oil sector—.*

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*I said, let me tell you something. The mining sector is actually rebounding, we have incredible potentials, one of the issues being that we have Bitumen which is under my portfolio. The interesting thing I am told about our bitumen is that it has heavy crude and I am told that the crude is almost as good as Venezuela crude and our bitumen reserve is estimated by some to be as twice our oil reserve. So if you think our oil sector has something to offer you and you're forward-looking, think of what could come out of the mining sector. At any rate, I said to them, when you come to Nigeria, we're going to have a mining conference as well with all the stuff that you're bringing. They said, well, what do you really have to offer—what would be the new thing you would say to the investors because every year you guys have your song and your dance at the mining conference and they talk about this mining bill that for six years people have been expecting and for six years they have not received.*

*I said one of the things that we will unveil will be the mining bill and I had no idea how I was going to get the mining bill but I knew I'd promised the world that I would unveil the mining bill, and if that's what it would take for them to come to the conference, I'd get to work on trying to get the mining bill. So I returned to Nigeria and ran off to Ken Nnamani and the Senate officers and said, please, I have said that we will have a mining investment conference and that we will unveil the mining bill there so it will be critical to pass the bill. Again evidence of the good will that I enjoyed in the administration across the sectors. We worked hard with all the challenges that it entailed and on February 1, 2007, actually the night before the Senate President acceded to the Bill which was transmitted to the President.. Every party that was, that had a role to play, including lowly paid clerical staff, all just worked very hard to clean up the bill so that it was ready for the President to sign and at 7 a.m. at the Presidential Breakfast on February 1 the President signed the bill and at 9 a.m. we convened the mining conference and the world saw that we had a Mining Act!. So that was mission accomplished.*

*Of course, on the heels of that, or in anticipation of that we had mobilized quite a bit of interest, even from big mining companies, some of whom had not taken interest in Nigeria, one of whom had been in Nigeria in the '30s and really didn't think that there was anything for Nigeria to offer. They all started coming back because they thought that they could see signs that were very, very promising.*

MAKGETLA: These were people who were involved in the mining sector who were coming back?

OBIORA: *Yes, these were the investors in the mining sector who had been standing by and just watching what was going on. Some of what they saw, a lot of what they saw was pleasing to them and promising to them and they started paying closer attention to us. Interestingly, the mining conference we had was February 1 and February 2, and it was a huge success. February 3<sup>rd</sup> I had to leave with some of my staff to go to the mining in Indaba in South Africa. While at the Indaba, my Permanent Secretary sent an SOS saying, oh they're struggling, it looks like the mining bill is going to be recalled. I'm like why would the mining bill be recalled. Apparently there was some irregularity with regards to the signing. I'm not sure, to this date I still don't understand what the issue was but apparently some separation of tasks between the executive and the legislature was not acceptable. I'm not sure how it happened.*

*But with the acceleration with which the bill finally saw the light of day, there were also allegations that people were induced that Senator Nnamani instituted a panel and I was invited to come and testify. The chair of the panel is now the Senate President, David Mark. I vividly remember sitting before David Mark*

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*emphatically saying “These are well-meaning Nigerians who worked very hard to make this happen because they saw that I meant business, that I came to work and I didn’t offer any material inducement. In fact, it did not even occur to me. If it means that this is the form of a witch-hunt or if it means that any heads will roll, let it be mine, I’ll be very glad to offer you my resignation at this point in time rather than have any of those people who worked so hard to make this happen be penalized or victimized.” And the inquiries after due investigation found that that was just a flagrant claim. But in the interim they’d already put out in the news that the bill was recalled. That sent a lot of jittery reaction across the mining sector again about inconsistencies. Of course, just all that aggravation and all sorts of just the tedium of the entire process of incessantly dealing with vested interests who had no conception of the national interest, let alone allegiance to a national interest got to me, to put it mildly.*

*I say that there are no Nigerians, that we have not taken the time to try to build a culture of patriotism and allegiance to a national whole so that we are typically identified as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa or as all the ways that make for fractionalization. In addition to that also, the constant in all of Nigeria’s travails and perpetual transition has been the civil service bureaucracy and yet they are the ones that people don’t pay any attention to but for lame interventions that they come up with, calling it civil service reform and all that stuff. Everybody focuses on the corruption of the political elite. They are actually corrupt, but I mean the corruption notwithstanding, I think who really torpedoes all these efforts are the ones that we leave behind when we go because to me those incidents, building up and complicating the tedium and aggravation of the whole process and the integrity of the process. At some point I said to the President, you know the honorable thing to do, quite frankly would be to offer my resignation and just move on because quite frankly I miss the peace and opportunity for intellectual stimulation of academia. I have a professional commitment and life when it comes to that. On principle I resigned on March 20<sup>th</sup>.*

*Upon resignation I ended up articulating I guess one of a kind, in Nigeria’s history, Hand-Over Notes. The Minister before me gave me a six-page hand-over note. I left a more than 3000 pages, a three-volume compendium for whoever took over from me. That was really, really exhaustive—delineating every step that we had taken and leaving for them some kind of a blueprint that they could build on, especially knowing that we had managed to animate some interest in the sector. It would be important for some level of continuity. But I was stunned when I returned to Nigeria about six months after resigning and returning to the United States, that the minister who had been appointed by the new administration said to me, oh madam, why was it that you left no hand-over notes. I said what are you talking about?*

*He said that the ministry said that I left no hand-over notes. And I thought oh my goodness. The good thing was that as a lawyer and as just my mother’s child, I had the good sense not just to leave a copy of those three volumes that I had done with the ministry but I left a set with the Presidency, a set with the office of the Chief of Staff, a set with the office of the Senate President and a set with diplomat partners who helped us including the Ford Foundation, UNDP, the Canadians High Commissioner and all that. I said, I scattered the stuff all over the place.*

*The ministry people, consistent with their pattern of making documents disappear, disappeared that one. I’m sorry that for six months he’d been I guess operating in the dark but I would call KPMG. Of course KPMG worked with me to put together the hand-over notes and to this date they remain in their archives.*

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*They remain the people who are holding the original document. I called Jude Okoro who was the team leader for the KPMG and he came and met us at the Hilton, both met myself and the new minister at the Hilton and brought a diskette for the minister and promised to bring a hard copy or whatever ancillary documents that he needed. I returned to the United States. I was just very sobered by the realities of experience. That it is not just about good intentions and reforms, but it is also about continuity and ownership of a process beyond rhetoric.*

MAKGETLA: Great. So one of the things that you've discussed in this narrative is your relationship to KPMG. Could you perhaps explain the role that they played? You described them taking over some of the management of the office, that being something you outsourced to them. Can you describe how you structured it, how you worked with them to develop that relationship?

OBIORA: *KPMG incidentally was also one of the stakeholders in the leadership forum that we had done because when we were looking on the growth of indigenous philanthropy through volunteer services. So the professional associations like the Nigerian Bar Association and Nigerian Medical Association and ICAN accounting and all that. We invited all of them so that we could have some thorough-going conversation about how to enhance the culture of giving through volunteer services in Nigeria. So when I got nominated and appointed Minister, KPMG was also one of those who came and said, we need to support you. Of course I said you should come and volunteer to do this. In taking a preliminary look it was obvious that this was really the kind of I guess archeological work that would entail confronting much of the demons of the past and also putting up the necessary architecture to a meaningful mining enterprise.*

*They, being the ones with the vast experience about the landscape in Nigeria and across the world as well with regards to the mining sector because they have a strong presence in South Africa and an impressive record. They invited the South Africa office experts to come and take a look and see what was needed and also under-take some training and other capacity-building efforts. Another thing also that I forgot to mention was I had made several efforts to woo McKenzie because I figured that administratively or procedurally KPMG could help me with the cleanup and we put in place checks and balances so that we would have a bit more of, an objectively, a system of objective integrity.*

*McKenzie in South Africa already had a strong clientele that we coveted so that they could be our Third-Party-Advocate to certify how serious we were about pipelining a solid foundation to safeguard investments. I've always said that Nigeria is an acquired taste that becomes an addiction. So those who have acquired the taste, I thought that the best way to promote the sector whereby they can actually certify that this is doable. Over and over I had testimonies of expatriates who had been in Nigeria for a while, who were really confirmed r affirmed my insights that there was something to Nigeria. If only you could get past the initial tedium and frustration of trying to deal with the place. I took comfort with a number of people like that as the advocates.*

*Given our bad reputation and yet to be extensively proven meaning assets, it took a while for me to persuade McKenzie to take time off their busy schedule to prioritize a mission to assess our fit. By the time they came with a very thoughtful and well put together team, I vividly remember they may have arrived in Nigeria on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. Before they came I actually had the support of some of the important Ministers in the Obasanjo administration and of course of Obasanjo really wanted our success. [Regardless of what people might think of it, he was*

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*actually an incredible person to work with from my own perspective in the sense that he was pretty much a hands-on boss who read everything I put on his desk and gave me the leeway to implement what I deemed expedient. He had a can-do and must-do attitude to a number of things, which was what I needed to do the work as forcefully as I was commanded to do it. So whatever I asked of him within reason he gave it to me and he gave it to me promptly.]*

*So again, not having any budgetary provision or prior fiscal allocation for some of these works, I had to appeal to the good offices of the Finance Minister Nnenadi Usman of course who made a compelling case to the Commander-in-Chief for some kind of a vote to be dedicated to paying McKenzie. I probably made their [expletive deleted] list as they arrived on the March 18<sup>th</sup> and were barely settling into the task when by the 20<sup>th</sup> I resigned on principle. At some point I decided to return to my professional commitment because of the onerousness of just trying to serve people in a minefield of bankrupt political practices. I sincerely regret that they ended up as part of the casualty of my resignation as with the change of administration and of course with the subversive civil service bureaucracy that didn't really want any of these to take root at any rate, just considered it Christmas coming too early for that. Ultimately, the Minister of State who took over from me had a different agenda and they had no support to persist with the pursuit of the goals we delineated. To make matters worse, I have no idea of what became of the funding that I secured and earmarked for their services and doubt that they were ever remunerated for their expenses and charges. I guess this is part of what gets conflated as "the Nigerian factor" that makes doing business in the country a hard-sell.*

*So KPMG as I had said earlier gave me a very comprehensive business plan that identified problematic issue and designed redress strategies that I annexed into my hand over the government and to a large extent that document was prepared in a way that it can actually be made a public document in the sense that there, I don't think there are any big secrets in there. So based on that program of action, and the steps that had been delineated, I said fine. Even something as basic as an IT strategy. How do you have in a repository for your documents that has all sorts of secure systems so that just one person having a bad day or having a bright idea does not thwart the entire process. Just things that you take for granted in other economies.*

*These logical steps were not necessarily within the realm of reason for some people, or some people thought when you brought up the issue that it was your way to institutionalize surveillance. Well, why not? Accountability is not rocket science. You can't talk about accountability if you don't have in place what it is going to take to facilitate accountability. You certainly cannot build an institution around mere mortals, either like myself who are going to move on to their professional commitment, or to suit my permanent secretary who only had three months to stay and was looking for a way to build up all retirement fund. If I may say so, she had her own agenda and her successor was no better. And you have to again come back to that national interest and try to identify what that interest is and articulate what it would take to make that interest transcendental. That was what I had insisted from the financial and accounting systems that they were to put in place, to the IT strategy to documentation strategy.*

*Even things like protocols as to how you track files that are in circulation so that if you ask somebody where is the file that has to do with this, they will say, this person took the file. You go to that person and that person doesn't know where the file is because they thought that somebody took the file. Why don't you even just put some form in front of a file that would let me know all those who dealt*

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*with the file at least in their official capacity and come up with a very quick sentence, even if it is just a very quick system of how we can track who has the file?*

*I will say that in all of this there were just some incredible testimonies. I vividly remember one particular young man named Abu, he must have been, I don't know if they have a level three rank, but he must have been one of the lowest cadre of civil service bureaucrats. He was like errand boy. Abu joined my front office team to work ungodly hours; sometimes, I brought them into the office before 7 a.m. and we may not leave until 2 a.m. I remember my secretary, Ngozi Obi, or Chief Security Detail, Emeka Ndukwe, always saying, Madam Minister, this is just treacherous, this is not safe, and Abu would be there. Nobody paid Abu more. Abu was just working because he realized that there was work to be done and that it was for the greater good so he would do that.*

*I guess the point I'm trying to make is that in no uncertain terms was the civil service bureaucracy a monolith that was solely constituted of nothing but certifiable criminals, but that it is well worth considering in this dimension the role they play in continuity or lack thereof of reform initiatives.*

MAKGETLA: You mentioned that when you came in the President had identified two issues that he felt were important, those being the mining bill and also foreign direct investment. Can you describe how your agenda was set when you arrived in office beyond that? Was that sort of—those were key priorities for you. How else did you begin to decide what were the key challenges that you needed to address?

OBIORA: *Before I came in, with the identification of the mining or the earmarking of the sector of the strategic ministry, unfortunately I was the ninth Minister in the short existence of the ministry; in eleven years the ministry had had nine ministers or in nine years it had eleven ministers, I forget which was exactly the case, but the turnover was remarkable. It just looked like there had been a mindless generation of tasks. Each person comes and they come up with their own bright idea and all that. But from the feedback, from those stakeholders that we were trying to cultivate and the funds we were trying to raise, there were some things that were just critical. As I said, I had come with eleven years of legal education and all my career, 90% of my career in academia, the other being just minimal practice experience in the legal sector as well. Taking on a technical portfolio like mining, it just was imperative that I had to be a good listener, that I had to spend a lot of time talking to people in places where they had succeeded—and doing my own research of what are some of the basic things that you need before you can even step out to say we are open for business.*

*For one, you need the enabling environment that I have indicated and the legislation is the pillar for that environment. You need the science; I vividly remember my predecessor had spent enormous energy trying to brand the ministry and when I came in the people who had the contract for the branding campaign took issue with my priorities because for me I was more into consciousness raising than the rhetorical branding and I didn't want to use the precious resource that we had for such a campaign.*

*One of the things that came out of the branding was they came up with some logo spotlighting the number "34" the idea being that they said that they had identified 34 different minerals that existed in Nigeria. Of course, in my initial days it was just like taking on the mantle and continuing with the run or taking on the baton and continuing with the run. I remember going to several conferences*

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*and talking about how we have 34 minerals and I remember one guy retorting back to me, "can you dig it?" And I actually echoed back "can you dig it!" My assumption was that he'd been fascinated by the rich repertoire we reported. Little did I realize then that "can you dig it?" actually was questioning the science behind the claim! In other words, can you really get to the assets. So it wasn't the cool "can you dig it," it was really "for real, can you dig it, do you know the quality, do you know the depth, do you know the whatever!" It wasn't so much about the quantity. Perth, Australia put itself on the map as a choice mining destination with only six main minerals. It doesn't have to have a zillion. If it was just gold that you had, the pivotal concern was that you had all it'd take between the science and the environment so that it could be dug.*

*So a lot of effort was put into trying to generate the science and the Nigerian Geological office which was championing that. I had of course countless obstacles much of which were as gratuitous as they were treacherous erected in my way. The World Bank was very instrumental in some of my core frustrations and it actually got to a point that I decided it was time for me to move on. I just thought that the Bank was in my way in many ways that subverted our national interest for their own inscrutable and at best sterile objectives. For instance, the arrogance of trying to dictate to a sovereign state that actually, regardless of its teething challenges, has its own intellectual capital that it could call on, made me just suspend the Bank's loan at some point. I mean I had a Commander-in-Chief that I didn't mind responding to and answering to, but if I had to be beholden to some institution that just has a cookie-cutter approach to what you were doing and was impervious to reason, it just was a waste of my time.*

*So, before I came they had taken 120 million dollars or something, from the World Bank. Of course when I came, a lot of the way that the money was being used was just scandalous, especially given that Nigeria had just received debt relief. At some point when the bank proved impervious to reason, to my mind, I suspended the loan because I didn't think that it should be approached as a petty-cash facility. I also figured that I didn't have that much time to stay in office anyway and that it'd be easier for me not to entertain any such indiscretion under my watch. I imagined they'd just wait out the end of my term until the next Minister comes and they can go ahead and introduce money if it entailed such troubling dimensions. After all, I was the one with the most to lose since I assumed office after the budget had been determined and I had programs that required funding some of which could actually come from the credit facility.*

*The first major file that was on my table when I came in was one to approve a contract for the renovation of a building for the ministry. And it turned out to be a building that was built in 1999 or so for just a mere fraction of what they were trying to use to innovate it. I asked what was the value-added? How are we going to use the building? Would it house all our key departments such as the geological survey and the mining cadastre office so that prospective inspectors could actually have one-stop rather than run from one destination to the other or rather than the inefficiencies of the key officers always travelling to the main office to consult. They said no, we still have to go and find properties for those ones. I said, what would it take for us to build our own.*

*They said it would take 3 million dollars more for us to build our own but of course it would take more than 3 million to get an office or about 3 million to get an office for the Cadastre office and about 3 million to get an office for what you call the other. I thought well, that's saving you 3 million there if it needs an extra 3 million to build your own stuff, but that was too late because by the time I came the train had already left the station and they said they had already called for*

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*bids. Also, looking at their procurement process, I discovered that they advertised and they say they received bids from seven expressions of interest, they disqualified five expressions of interest based on technicalities and they disqualified another one based on some other issue.*

*Then the one who got the contract was, to my mind, a default and I thought that was the functional equivalent of having only one substantive, one viable bid which would recommend that you open up the bid again. To my mind, we're not in that much of a hurry, especially since the purpose of procurement is to get the best advantage, right? Anyway, they said it had already been awarded to that person and that we should plan it for this person. There were lots of things about that contract that did not make sense to me but people said, you know what, this will not be a good fight to take on, why don't you just go and approve this one and find ways to get the most mileage out of the contract. And part of who participated in the leadership forum were people from the architecture professional society and the engineering society and I remember two people in particular, Sule Adamu and Ibrahim Haruna who reassured me that they will volunteer and be overseers for nothing for you: They were like "Just so we will be sure that whatever you're looking for is optimized, just so this is done." I was particularly concerned because the collapse of buildings in Lagos and Abuja had been in the news.*

*One of the other issues was that they had also the bid for the airborne geophysical survey before I came. In fact, a portion of Nigeria had been awarded for the arial geological survey to some outfit in South Africa which when I came I think the company was already three years or more behind the deadline that they had given. One of the first things I did was go to the company in South Africa and sit with them to ask how can we move the agenda forward. They came to Nigeria and consistently we were trying to figure out a way through whatever differences caused the delay as the data they were to generate was of signal importance for our purposes. It got to the point that I scaled back my hope that they'd deliver before the end of 2006 and started shooting for February, which was the mining conference as a date to unveil the data. The idea was that in February we would say that we not only have the bill, but that we also have results and the completed survey.*

*Anyway, the bank orchestrated the bid for the remaining portions of Nigeria in a way that it would favor this particular company because they asked for a company that had flown a certain number of miles, that had a certain number of helicopters in its fleet and it was precisely this company even if they didn't call it by name. The remainder of the portion for Nigeria was also given to this particular company that had been holding us hostage all these years. I couldn't even believe it. I said that's rewarding bad behavior and to make matters worse, it would tie my hands as I'd have nothing to share with investors by way of objective data if this company continues on the path of protraction. Why would the Bank do something that counter-intuitive and actually take umbrage at my good faith effort to understand their rationale. It is one thing that the market is not that competitive and that the company may qualify before others on the surface, but you don't have to give it the entire bulk, even if you must include it in this second award.*

*Why don't you just divvy it up? I don't care if it is to—six companies that can do different portions of the task so long as you are able to stimulate competition and that they are able to do this stuff. They said well, it's too late. Again, choose your fights, let's give it to this company. Very well. Let's see. Maybe—the company came and said we'll never delay this time and we'll do whatever you want us to*

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*do and blah, blah, blah. Okay. So how much is it? It was advertised for 10 million dollars, okay? Do you want me to approve it? Approval says it should be approved for 25 million dollars. I'm like: Do the math. Can somebody explain to me why in ten months this stuff has been varied by 150%? Why? Why was it advertised for 10 million and now you want me to approve it for 25 or 20 million or something like that. I don't remember the details. I said. Sorry, I will not do it unless you give me a compelling explanation because this really points out the flaws in what you are doing. It just became very, very heavily contest and just aggravating interactions, with a mud-slinging campaign spear-headed by the Bank folks against me in addition to concocting all sorts of malicious tales to the President .*

*At some point I said, you know what, it's either their shoddy standards or mine on this one because I was dead set against squandering the loan as either some petty cash facility or some trust fund over which the Bank had absolute discretion. In the final analysis, I am the one who bears the burden to go and look for funding elsewhere because as I said, I was appointed after the case for the budget had already been made for the year. It would be, it would make my life easier to say there is approximately 120 million dollars that could be used, but, you know what, it is against my conscience and I will not use it. Instead I will go and start begging money for defining tasks from other specific partners to do my job and that's basically what I did. When, the issue became their way or the highway, I thought, you know what, I have a professional commitment and I really don't think that much of this is useful or productive. So in going back to your question about identifying the key things to do in terms of a reform, to integrate the sector, a number of them were just informed from objective experiences of destinations that have succeeded and from feedback and just basic things. The fact that you would need the science, you would need an enabling environment. You would need secure titles and all that. Then you try to build on those and to strengthen those dimensions that were critical to induce or to build the confidence of the investors that we were trying to attract.*

MAKGETLA: In carrying through some of these reforms to strengthen the sector in these various ways, did you have a team of people that you brought in to work with? You mentioned some of the struggles you have with the Permanent Secretaries. Did you have anyone on your side who you felt you could work with and who you could trust?

OBIORA: *Definitely. As I said, I came in with incredible good will, very heartwarming and sobering in the sense that the work I was doing turned out to be fortuitous and had all these people who were waiting to help. Also some of my colleagues in the cabinet, a good number of them who commanded resources saw that I was not left without the finances that I needed to move the agenda forward, especially since I deemed it most expedient to suspend the bank loan rather than act as a mere rubber stamp and take instructions from unseasoned and self-serving technocrats who were primarily motivated by meeting their lending/spending limits at all costs or who had their own unholy agenda at the same time they were parading around as the good governance and sound procurement gurus. I remember the energy minister. In fact on occasion, he teased to the President that I should be his energy minister because I was full of energy.*

*The finance minister as I said would give me what I needed, knowing some of my constraints were also largely financial. I remember when an issue came up about the tax regime that had been recommended for the mining bill. This was feedback from investors overseas who had read the draft bill and were wondering why that particular tax regime was chosen and had to draw on*

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*stakeholders in the government, civil society and private sector who volunteered to put their minds together and came up with compelling arguments that quelled the World Banks' lame claims and fierce agitations.*

*In fact, incredible Nigerians, somebody like Dotun Suleiman who used to be the head of Accenture and who I think had just retired by the time I became minister. He would fly from Lagos to Abuja once a month to give me a week volunteering to help do things to help us put things in place. I remember at some point, when some issues came to a head, the private sector threw its full weight of support behind me. Aliko Dangote, for example, came and said what do you need. He offered to underwrite some services and the like. Just people would hear through the grapevine or through the newspaper that was for the most part despicably entrenched in "cash-and-carry" journalism what some of the issues were and say: You know what, you're working very hard, this means a lot to us, we want to support you and how can we do it. And the President for the most part he was phenomenal. I think when it was time for the elections, you know, some of it became crazy. I think the blinders asserted themselves with a vengeance. .*

*Not being a politician, I didn't really—I had constructive impatience for some of what was masquerading on the landscape around that time. I think his energy and focus was diverging from the kind of staunch support that I had enjoyed from him at the beginning of the beginning on the key issues. So I basically, told him that I'd gladly resign and move on than cave into what I considered outrageous pressure from enemies of our national progress. In fairness to President Obasanjo, he did not believe I will resign and he took off to some campaign in Sokoto or so only for me to proceed to turn in my resignation letter to the Secretary to the Federal Government who called him to report the development. A lot of people that I respected tried to prevail on me to withdraw the letter, but I just had a deep sense that it was time to move on, especially with all that we had accomplished in record time.*

MAKGETLA: Within—.

OBIORA: *Interestingly the ministry had some really competent people, one of whom is Ebuk Ekpo, the Legal Director. Then Sheik Goni who had actually trained at the Imperial College and had extensive experience doing a lot of things in the mining sector since his early days at the Nigerian Mining Corporation and serving as the Special Assistant to a number of Ministers. I was talking to him this Sunday when some investors had approached me about their interest in the mining sector and I said Sheik now has oversight for the Mining Cadastre or the licensing office. So I had sent Sheik an e-mail saying that I'm going to send some investors your way. Sheik, when we spoke on Sunday, Sheik said, "Madam, you would not believe it, your programs are still being used for the mining sector; the mining school is just about to take off and it is the program of action that you had proposed and had starting implementing before you left that is being resuscitated."*

*That was also another point of departure between me and the World Bank in the sense that the World Bank had envisaged that we would spend money establishing a mining school that should be more of a trade school. I said this is inconsistent with the privatization objectives of the government. Why would the government be privatizing ownership and management of the other assets only to go into running a school, only as a technical school? I mean, what's the value added? If you're looking for value added, you'd be looking for a Center of Excellence or a Research Center that is not like anything that we have in Nigeria. We already have a lot of geological institutions that operate as trade schools.*

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*The government's comparative advantage is that it can afford to mobilize the kind of resources that you would need to incubate a world class Center of Excellence that could also service other West African countries.*

*The bank was very upset because it felt that we had departed from what they originally dictated. The morale of the point I'm making is the vindication of some of those efforts. It's taken a while, but I hear it is happening and that is the beauty of what can stand the test of time and the light of day. It speaks for itself at the end of the day – like it or not. If you're really committed to a viable a way forward, it's very likely that it would be dusted off the shelf and put to use.*

MAKGETLA: This is interesting, the way you describe your interaction with the bank because not all ministers or governments can easily say no to them. How would you describe the strategy that you employed to perhaps distance yourself from policies or not have to tow their line while perhaps not destroying the relationship between the government as a whole and the bank. I mean, was that something you were conscious of, having to balance that relationship?

OBIORA: *I had worked for the bank. When the bank recruited me I wasn't a flatterer or an admirer of the bank but they had recruited me precisely because they said they were looking for a "new face" of the bank, those who would speak truth to power and blah, blah, blah. You know, having learned about the culture there, knowing about the arrogance and just the quite frankly just how some of that emanate from a false sense of self and from a doze of insecurity that makes for the level of territoriality that compounds some of the difficulties that the bank has. It wasn't really—I didn't think twice about whose interest was decisive—my greatest disappointment was the level to which the bank degenerated to fight me, from smear campaigns to mud-slinging and all sorts of silly stuff. But I had my eye on the prize and just refused to budge.*

*The one thing was that I still was the Executive Cabinet Minister and true to form, I was confident that I could stand and not cave into mischief. I refused to reinstitute that loan and the very day I resigned, before the end of that day, within that very day, the junior minister who assumed office reinstated the loan. Go and look at the annals of history and see what they did with the loan in the two months that they had before the end of that administration and tell me who stands to be vindicated by history. And yet these are the people who stand in judgment and talk about accountability and good governance and stuff like that.*

MAKGETLA: As we wrap up, I'd also like to ask you sort of strategically how you dealt with civil servants who you felt were hiding files from you or engaging in corrupt activities. What were the sort of general approaches you would say that you took to addressing those very important issues in your ministry?

OBIORA: *The question was how—.*

MAKGETLA: You described the various ways that civil servants withheld files from you and undermined your efforts to change things within the ministry. When you identified people who were doing that or maybe sections of the ministry, how did you go about addressing it, what were the strategies that you employed in that context?

OBIORA: *I think that part of it too is again the importance of not essentializing any of these entities because even within the civil service, and as I said I was thrown in at the deep end, without notice, without interest, without anything and made to entertain the luxury of failure—I was forced to swim because in my life, sinking is really not an option. So as I was dealing with some of these things, the civil servants who*

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*had been there through eleven ministers or nine ministers before me, I guess some of those who were there to work identified in me someone who meant business.*

*One of the things I did was that in my very first few weeks, I devoted ample time to meeting with every single employee of the ministry, including those in our various field offices. I had individual sessions with everyone. I brought them into my office. We chatted. I asked them their concerns, I asked them how we could work together, what success would look like to them – up to the errand boy level. And that's why these people that saw the need to pick their sides on the intrigues that ensued. These are not zombies, but rational agents. Intrigue is a quaint term that Nigerians use for a cesspool. So when the Permanent Secretary saw it fit to cannibalize assets that belonged to the ministry, without my knowing, I got wind of it because of a low-ranking whistle-blower. I did not know of the existence of the assets because nobody gave me an inventory of what the ministry had and all that stuff. So I didn't know that there was a parastatal that had assets and capital equipments.*

*So that while the privatization, the Permanent Secretary and her cohorts must have come up with a scheme to distort the listing and they started butchering up the stuff among themselves and their kin. It was whistle blowers from within the ministry who sent the anonymous note saying Madam, please could you call for the file on this and blah, blah, blah. I guess my good intentions to a large extent and the fact of trying to cultivate everybody right from the start as a stakeholder really sort of drove a wedge and de-centered some of the strongholds. So in addition to that, I took to bringing the experts who could help them, say for instance address some material challenges liking availing them of the time and resources to build their skills and their competences. Well let's bring in a coach, let's bring in KPMG, let's bring in whatever you need to build your capacity and help you develop the competency. Some took it very seriously. Some of course thought, we're too old, this is too late in the day and we're getting ready to retire. So there was a whole range of outreaches and effort and lots of conversations and humbling experiences. All of them learning experiences that teach you so that when you stumble, you learn to stumble forward the next time.*

*I guess for me the bottom line is, interestingly, serving Nigeria made me realize there was incredible hope for Nigeria and that development is not rocket science, really. The United States was built by individuals. I happen to have been teaching in this country for the past nineteen years. I know that where I come from, I'm reckoned among the average. I remember going to school in Nigeria. I wasn't among the smartest kids in the classroom. Here I've managed to hold my own excellently and I've always wondered where are all those incredibly brilliant resources that we have in Nigeria. Other than the accident of birth and the fact that I had opportunities that gave me the exposure and helped me hone my acumen, what'd be my lot and what would life be like if we had the kinds of institutions and opportunities that they have in the United States in Nigeria? All it really takes is rolling up your sleeves and trying to figure out who is on your side and start doing those excavation and heavy-lifting that it takes to set a deep foundation for nation-building.*

*And knowing that it's nothing personal, that you will be attacked. But that truth will speak for itself. Eternally.*

MAKGETLA: Well, thank you very much. This has been a very interesting conversation. Is there anything that you would like to add for people who are listening to this who

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might be engaged in trying to reform similar areas who might encounter challenges along the way that you've learned from your experience?

OBIORA: *Sorry, your question was, is there anything I might ask?*

MAKGETLA: This program is designed to help people share their experiences of engaging in reform and the challenges that they face. Is there anything that you'd like add?

OBIORA: *Anything that I would like to add to this?*

MAKGETLA: Yes.

OBIORA: *To what I said? No, it's just, at the end of the day I guess this is my message to a friend of mine Christiana Tah who became Liberia's Attorney General. She called me and I said the end justifies the means. So for those of us Africans who are on this side of the Atlantic and looking back to Africa with nostalgia and wondering, how we could "sing the Lord's song in a strange land," or what it would take for us to make home home, it is tedious work, it's not easy, it's thankless, but, you know it is like building a dream. People give, some people give their lives to build a dream. So none of this is easy. It's not like you're looking for a halo. Nobody is going to necessarily celebrate you in that respect, but at the end of the day, that you do your part. But there are so many people in the ministry who today still send me e-mails, just talking about how they miss me - It is just the little lives that you touch and the differences that you make along the way; it may be an instructor's approach that I have to this because as a teacher I know that if you build it they will come. Whatever it is that you're building, whether it is catalyzing the mining sector or trying to change a culture, and introduce a culture of reform, people will pick up pieces of it here and there.*

*This is not the most coherent I have been but that also speaks to the difficulty of saying to people to stand in the line of fire just for the good of the continent and for the good of the motherland.*

MAKGETLA: Well thank you very much for sharing your thoughts, I think it will be very interesting to listen to for others.

OBIORA: *Thank you.*