



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewee: Nuhu Ribadu

Interviewer: Daniel Scher and Graeme Blair

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Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice  
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA  
[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

SCHER: My name is Daniel Scher, and I'm the associate director of the Innovations for Successful Societies project. I'm here with Mr. Graeme Blair and Mr. Nuhu Ribadu. Mr. Ribadu, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak to us. We realize you're a very busy man, and we appreciate it.

RIBADU: *It's my pleasure.*

SCHER: Well sir, as head of Nigeria's EFCC [Economic and Financial Crimes Commission] you made several really impressive contributions. Among other things, you managed to prosecute at least 113 cases of fraud, which had never been done before in the history of Nigeria. You shut down over 2,000 illicit 419 scam operators. You were able to check on and begin the process for recovering nearly five billion dollars in looted assets, looted money.

RIBADU: Yes.

SCHER: Today we would like to ask you to reflect a little bit on your experience and to offer some guidance to people who are asked by their countries to assume similar tasks. To begin with, sir, I'd like to ask: at the time that you took over this position, Nigeria had a small team of reformers like yourself in place. Would you describe a little bit how this group started, who it was comprised of, and how it was important for your own work?

RIBADU: *Well, I think the group somehow came together by accident. It was not really like it was a plan or prepared arrangement for people of different backgrounds to come together and start something. Individuals pursued their own lives and careers in a different way, and by whatever fit found themselves at this particular point in time believing in some of the things they were doing, and together they collectively came together to help each other.*

*I'll probably just be talking about myself for now, basically who I am and how I—what really happened. I've been in the public service all my life. I went to school in Nigeria, all my schooling. I graduated as a lawyer. I joined the Nigerian police force in 1985. After graduating as a lawyer, I decided to join. What made me to do so was simple. I believe that in countries like Nigeria, if there is going to be hope, chances are it is going to be through the enthronement of law and order, rule of law, doing things properly and correctly. The best place where I could just put that into practice is law enforcement, particularly, in our own case, the Nigerian police force.*

*I knew that the problem facing Nigeria even at that time was simply that of lawlessness. That leads all sorts of mismanagement, incompetence, not doing things properly and correctly, corruption, wastage, and so on. Today it is because of lawlessness that we have insecurity. It is because of this, simply, that our laws are not enforced and that people take advantage of positions they find themselves. Therefore I wanted to put my own little contribution towards putting society in the right direction, on the path. Law enforcement would give me that platform. I decided to join the Nigerian police force. I remained throughout in the police force until 2003, when the chance came, when the EFCC was set up.*

*By chance, by luck, I got the opportunity to come and head it, to start it afresh. That was in 2003. Then also—luck again—at that time there was a change of government in Nigeria. [Olusegun] Obasanjo had a second term at that time. I think he also came with his own ideas of trying to be different from the first term.*

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*There were a couple of people who also somehow came into the government for the first time, including, of course, people like Ngozi [Okonjo-] Iweala, Obi Ezekwesili, Nasir el-Rufai, I think four or five were the first nucleus of people. I didn't know anyone of them until after the appointment. Nasir, we went to the same school, although he was a bit senior, not that I was close to him or anything.*

*When I got the appointment of the EFCC, that appointment came simply because, one, I think even the government did not realize what exactly it was. It was pressure from the Financial Action Task Force [FATF] together with some foreign countries that wanted Nigeria to improve its own anti-money laundering regime. Therefore they asked Nigeria to have a new law and then set up a commission to enforce the law. I happened to get that chance to lead that commission.*

*So when I got it, at that time Nasir el-Rufai was at the BPE, Bureau of Public Enterprises. So I went to him, I met him. I said, look, I have this commission, and I think it can do a lot of good for our country if we pursue the thinking that I have, and I want us to start cleaning up, sanitizing, and setting new standards and telling the world that we have changed and new things across the board. Help me do things properly and correctly. He bought the idea. He said, well, that is fantastic. That's how it started.*

SCHER: I'm sorry to jump in there, but can I just ask you to talk in a little bit more detail about how this appointment came about? You say it was by luck, but I'm sure it was not all luck. Did you nominate yourself for the position?

RIBADU: *What happened is that I think the appointment of the chairman of the EFCC was given—or the responsibility of getting people who will head it was given to the then Attorney General of Nigeria, whose name was Kanu Agabi. I worked with him. I was then the head of the prosecution department of the Nigerian police force in Abuja. Most if not all of the very important cases involving criminals in Nigeria, I was handling it. I was the one who prosecuted, for example, the Abachas at that time. I was the one who prosecuted the speaker of the house then. I was the one who was going after—almost every big case, I was involved. So that was how I got to know the attorney general. He felt that I could do the job even though the culture in Nigeria was to look for an elder person, a very senior officer. But he felt that I could do it. I was not even in the country at the time that they nominated me, I was out. I came to Atlanta, the [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center] in Atlanta, Georgia.*

*So they nominated me while I was away. It became a little bit controversial because there was a lot of resistance from some people within. But somehow, what eventually Obasanjo told me—because I didn't know him, I'd never met him; indeed, I worked for a while before even meeting him for the first time—he said that there was so much pressure on everybody when my name was mentioned. Everybody said, "Oh, what is this, oh great," and he said he was overwhelmed. A few people resisted and thought that he was selfish because they wanted their own people. But every person who knew me was saying, "My goodness, this is it." So he told me that. He mentioned a couple of names, people within his government and around who somehow, when they heard my name said, "No, you can never get anything better than this." But he didn't know me. So that's how it happened.*

*I went through, of course, the screening of the National Assembly. Also with the members of the board, because there are other members who were going to be*

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*on the board of the commission. But as chairman I was the chief executive, so the power was with me, basically. I got cleared, and I started it. But there was no money, no budget, nothing. Partly—typical of Nigerian things—nobody thought that it was anything big or important, just another agency created, and to maybe just go like that, and so on. But I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I'd had a very clear vision for a long time in my life, I knew the problems confronting us. I know that. Even the reforms people are talking about it. You can never do reform unless you sanitize, you clean up. The foundation of reform is basically to address the problem of mismanagement, incompetence, and then this wastage as a result of either corruption or just pure misrule, and I was out to address that.*

*Even though all of us were in one way or another involved in the reforms, I believed the reform that was necessary [was] that of cleaning up, to sanitize, especially in countries like our own where things have been so bad for such a long period of time that it has become a normal thing, a routine, a way of life. Like what you are saying, in countries like Nigeria, over 40 years after independence, one of the worst in terms of corruption record. It is the worst in transparency, at least, the most corrupt country, but we did not have one single conviction for corruption, one single conviction. It's amazing. But I got over—close to 300 convictions at the time when I left. So how do you ever carry out reforms when the whole thing is so compromised and so endemic?*

*No policy of government can ever work unless you start from the basics, unless you will start cleaning up and giving a chance for policies to work. Unless, of course, you would be able to preserve these resources and then not allow [them] to be converted into negative use. Unless you start making good use of these resources, no policy can work. You can continue to have fiscal bills, you can continue to have new policy, you can have budgets—all is trash, is nonsense. Indeed, even the world will not believe you.*

*So when I got here, and it became like accident, like I told you. I met with this Nasir guy, and he was all—he had connections with the other people. I didn't know them. I was doing my thing, and they came with their own fantastic and wonderful ideas, everybody. Ngozi was coming from the World Bank, a very smart woman, extremely knowledgeable about economics and so on, management. Obi Ezekwesili: very, very fantastic woman in governance and issues of accountability and transparency. We all came together. That was the birth of the so-called reform team that really made a massive impact of change in the country.*

*My own part was simply because I came with this law-and-order thing. I said that is it, that is the key.*

SCHER: So can I ask you now—you say you had a vision of what you wanted to do.

RIBADU: Yes.

SCHER: Lots of people have visions, and the real problem is to turn them into reality. You're somebody who actually managed to turn his vision into—

RIBADU: *That's it.*

SCHER: Turn your vision into—

RIBADU: *Practical reality.*

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SCHER: Yes, practical reality. Over 300 convictions. So can I ask you—?

RIBADU: *So much. Even more than the convictions is—a little thing, but the impact of change of mood and attitude in the world, the perception, the belief that it can be done. I am the only one, I can tell you, probably out of the whole thing that set up the commission that delivers. You know, this is very important. Go and see how agencies work in Nigeria and developing countries. No. This, within a short period of time I was able to set it up and for it to be an example. It is not just a Nigerian household name, but world.*

SCHER: Absolutely.

RIBADU: *By any standard it is a success.*

SCHER: So what is the secret? How did you go about in the early days setting up an organization that can have such an impact?

RIBADU: *Partly it is just you, who you are. I tend to disagree with a lot of people who say it is your background, or some people say religion or—. Basically, some people are like that. Some people, it is just who they are. I followed being myself, and I followed belief in myself, and I followed some—I was looking for opportunity for me to do what is right and improve it. I've always been a very courageous person, I take risks and chances. I'm fairly clear in my own mind what exactly are my beliefs and what is needed for me to actualize my own objectives.*

*I told you about as far back as when I finished my school. I had an opportunity, there's something we call National Service, NYSC, National Youth Service Corps, in Nigeria. After graduating from university you have to go for one year of national service. I did it at the time when politicians were being brought to justice after the military coup in 1984. So I participated in some of the investigations and the prosecution. I found what I liked. I found that maybe this was exactly what was going to make me happy in my life. It really put into perspective what exactly makes me happy. I think that is very important in whatever you pursue in life, the ability to identify at an early stage what gives you satisfaction.*

*So it also helped, for example: your nature. For example, I'm not a material person. I'm OK, where I live is fine. I have never put materialism as extremely important in life. I am not a rigid person, I'm simple, I'm quiet, I'm normal, ordinary. I also may be partly—well, I can say from a family of public service people, which means there are businessmen in my family. Maybe subconsciously that played—whatever, I don't know, because I didn't grow up to see people with factories or manufacture, or trade as in my own—.*

*So that maybe may help. But I'm also very lucky. Sometimes by luck you get to do what you like. When I did my NYSC, I had this opportunity, and I had a good job, a very fantastic job. I had about seven offers, some of them were very, very good. But I devalued myself to join the police force, because it is not very glamorous work at all. It is one of the worst. There was not much salary, not at all. From a very fairly wealthy background—my father was a cabinet minister, everything was going very well for me. I was never a poor human being growing up. I had a chance to—well, my name is a big name in terms of Nigeria, a political family, all this stuff. So it was OK for me, if I wanted anything, I had good, fantastic-paying jobs. I had a job to start in New York in 1985. I turned it down. I had a job to work with the national petroleum company. I refused. I had a job to work with one of the biggest banks, PZ Industries, a very big firm, manufacturing company in Nigeria. They gave me a very big position, but I felt that my own*

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*happiness would be in doing what I liked, what I enjoyed. To be honest, I want to fight for justice. I really have that satisfaction in believing that I stand for what is right and just. I dislike those people who take advantage and then selfishly—. By nature, I think that is me.*

*Therefore, that opportunity, to do that work, for example, insisting that those who believe that they are above the law and like God and so on, they have to account for their misdeeds, it helps me, gives me that satisfaction. It makes me believe that I'm making a massive positive contribution for a progressive society, and that helped me because I understood from the outset that fundamentally our problem is that of failure of leadership. Leaders who selfishly take care of their own interests to the detriment of the society. It is across—even at our own local level, the national level and the continental level, even at the world level, problems of Africa are purely simple failures of leadership arising from those who are in charge.*

*You see, for example, the tragedy of the Congo. It is just one individual, [Joseph-Désiré] Mobutu, that's all. The tragedy of Zimbabwe today is just one individual, [Robert] Mugabe. The tragedy of Somalia as a country, [Siad] Barre. Go back through history and look at it. You go through it all, you have these massive pathetic failures. You will come to just one conclusion, that it is a failure of leadership; it is terrible. Today Iraq is what it is simply because of one madman called Saddam, who messed it up and destroyed the whole people. Even on my own, as of that time, I somehow understood that the problem is that of these so-called powerful people who selfishly mess up the thing and then everybody suffers for it. Confronting them somehow gives me satisfaction.*

*It is not that I am a wicked person, no. Honestly, I'm not. Even those, the powerful people that I used to bring to justice, it used to hurt me, because they are human beings. I hate to humiliate anybody, but I also feel that there is a need for justice. I also feel that we have to do certain things, even if it is painful, for the common good of all of us. So that is me, that's how I came into the office in 2003. When I met these guys, we came together. All of them were doing some fantastic things, some in public service reforms; others were trying to build fiscal discipline; others were trying to build procurement mechanisms that will help us keep transparency and things like that.*

*We also came together and said, there is need for us to even have a working document that can guide this reform that we intend to carry out. That's how we came about this NEEDS [National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy]. Collectively we helped each other. At the end of the day I think we fairly succeeded, and we showed that it could be done. It changed the country in a short period of time, a very big, profound change.*

SCHER: You have a clear vision, you know what you like to do. You're good at it, you've done it before. How do you as the head of an organization go about finding people who share your sentiments, finding other good people?

RIBADU: *That is a good—you are right.*

SCHER: How did you do this? How did you find these people?

RIBADU: *You are right, because I started by telling you the reason why I met Nasir el-Rufai. At that time he was heading BPE [Bureau of Public Enterprise], and I took assessment of government agencies in Nigeria at that time. I thought maybe this is one is closest to my idea of a good agency that could deliver. By my nature I*

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*tend to learn. I want to understand and acquire whatever—if I see something good in you, I want to get it from you for me.*

*So I met him. I said, look, this is my intention. I want assistance from you to set up this commission. He put one or two people with me to understand the structure of how things are being done and how they run it. I took the best out of it. Then even before I started recruiting—I worked in the Nigerian police, I knew individuals. So I picked people. I was the one who picked the original first 14 people. I said come and join me please, we have a mission. Most of them I believe were OK, fairly good, who would only require leadership. Most people can be all right depending on how you direct them.*

*So continuously, I continued to approach and go for wherever I could get people. There are several people that I recruited at the initial stage. For example, I went to meet with the United Nations. I met one lady, one Nigerian girl, Juliet Ume-Ezeoke. I was quite impressed with what I saw. I told her, come, let's work. Let's work for our country. You're working for the UN, but your country is sick; come, let's work, and I got her. Fantastic woman. I could spot such talent, and I continued to poach. I got one or two people from the USA, including an individual who was working for IBM, and so on. So one by one I was getting people. That is the start of it.*

*When I started, the next thing I did was to engage the international community. I knew I had a lot to learn from those who had the experience, whose system was working. My work is that of law enforcement. I approached the UK authorities. I said, look, first and foremost—the very first month I started working I requested a meeting with all European Union ambassadors in Nigeria. They all came in the office. I went, and I addressed them. I told them, "Look, guys, I have this opportunity and a chance to do something for my country. Nigeria is sick. I think this way I am looking at it may help us to get out of problems. What is needed is to fight corruption; what is needed is to sanitize. What is needed is to establish law and order, and I need your help. I may not get the help entirely because the place is already compromised. Few people can even understand my message. So therefore you, as representatives of where things are working properly and correctly, you understand these things, I need your support."*

*They said, "We are ready, 100%." I became their darling because I spoke to them honestly and frankly. They gave me the promise of giving me money there and then. Ultimately I got the support of as much as 23 million euros from them. More importantly, I singled out a couple of them where I thought I could get something direct, the American and British High Commission. I said, "Guys, I need your help." The embassy arranged for a meeting for me to visit London and meet some strategic agencies that I engaged, and I spoke to them directly. That is how I got to talk to the Home Office, Justice Ministry, Metropolitan Police, Serious Fraud Office, NCIS [Naval Criminal Investigation Service], and so on. They paid for me to go to London and meet with these guys. I went, I talked to them, I told them my mission. "I want to set up a commission that can deliver results. I want to fight corruption. I want to fight 419, I want to fight, generally and I need your help. It cannot be done in Nigeria. I want you to help me. If I start getting young Nigerians for you to help me train—. I want the modern technology that can help me in the call that I am going to do. I want to bring the best set of Nigerians. I want to indoctrinate them to believe in this cause. I want them to be like me." They helped me.*

*So after going back, I came away with a very vigorous system of recruitment in the EFCC. I attracted the best. Through a process of interviews we ended up*

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*with the best. We gave them the best training you can imagine. For example FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] alone, that is Justice Department in the US alone gave me over 40 trainers. That's why our people were probably one of the best, until recently when things changed in our country now.*

*These are some of the general things. But if you go to the details—I am going to the real details. For example, right from the first time I was setting up the EFCC, I was setting up training at the oversight institute at the same time. I made sure that at minimum, 25% of the time in the commission, people will spend in training. Seventy-five percent you work, 25% you learn. I made it the standard. So in one month when you work for 25 days or 23 days, you learn for seven days. I mean just roughly, from the beginning.*

*It is all part of what I came up with, a system through which, because I'm starting fresh, I'm going to bring people that can really deliver as well. Gradually like that we started growing. Then I linked directly, worked to build the confidence with the international community, for them to have the trust and believe. More or less, for example, when I was setting up the Financial Intelligence Unit, I learned from the US and the UK and sent my own people to you, those who operate similarly like South Africa, Mauritius, and so on, Italy, everywhere. I ended up having many—better than all of them, because I've learned from everybody.*

*That's how I carried out the assignment and how I built it up. Get the best quality people and then continue to improve them on a continuous basis, and also be very tough and zero tolerance for anything that is not proper and correct. In the first place, the problem in Nigeria is corruption. So you have to make absolutely a zero level of corruption. Zero level, none, because the moment you give room for it, it compromises every other thing. But more importantly, lead by example. Lead transparently. Lead openly. I have never had a secret, especially in the office. Whatever I do, I do collectively. Whoever is supposed to know something will know. Whoever is supposed to be part of a decision-making process will be part of it. I have nothing that I do under the table or anything. I try to be open and transparent because it helps. It helps to send a message, a clear signal, how these are. It also helps everybody to open. If you do as a leader, you are the one who is doing that, every other person will come along.*

*This type of thing helped me to shape the whole thing and get the results at the end of the day.*

SCHER: But let me ask you something. You were talking about how you got support from the international community and you were also looking to get support from within Nigeria. Nigeria has a long history of people saying we're going to clean things up in our military regime. Even the word sanitize has been used at various times. How did you convince people that you were different?

RIBADU: *You do it by showing practically. For example, when I started working, the first thing I told you I did was I met with Nasir el-Rufai. But the week I was meeting, before I met him, I arrested all the 419 people in Nigeria, the fraudsters. You know 419? People who sit in Nigeria and cheat others outside? I arrested all the big known—they are known, in Nigeria everybody knows them. They made so much money from the system; they compromised the judiciary, the law enforcement, and they became like role models, the kings. It was shocking. One morning everybody woke up, and they heard I arrested Fred Ajudua, I arrested Morris Ibekwe, I arrested [Emmanuel] Nwude. These are big names. Abe Bendel. And before anybody knew the name Nuhu Ribado, it started. That was how I introduced myself. I wasn't joking.*

SCHER: So this was a strategy.

RIBADU: *Yes. Then what I did was, I also adopted what I then called "suitable target for maximum impact." I picked a target and made something out of it that could really resonate, it would go after and then continue to boomerang. I did that with the big 419 fraudsters. By attacking them, I sent a message to every single 419 fraudster. I sent a message to every single Nigerian that the time had come for us to be serious. It is not just rhetoric, it is not just talk. The day I arrested the inspector-general of police, who was my boss, it was a suitable target with maximum impact. It was, because it sent shivers through every policeman in Nigeria, and everybody who'd been a doubting Thomas understood that there was a new thing happening in our country. The inspector-general of police was arrested. The Senate president was arrested. Governors were arrested. We didn't need to really shout. You didn't need to just use rhetoric. The work—you can do it systematically. Then I took my time to work it out as a plan.*

*I started with the soft targets, because if I started with the politicians, they all would have been knocked out easily, even before I did. But people didn't have problems if I was arresting 419 fraudsters. Oh, that's good. When I went after those who were just duping foreigners, oh, that is good. Everybody was hailing me. I was gradually going, I was building up momentum. It was all planned. I planned it. I did it. I got to the point where nobody could do anything, and people started believing. Yes. Also strategically, part of what I did was deliberately—like I told you, I was very open and transparent, I wasn't hiding anything.*

*Then I engaged the media. The reason why I did with the media was simply because the media can destroy or build me. Usually they are the first of the skeptics you are talking about. We have heard this before. What is the difference? I invited them to be part of whatever I am going to do. I am not going to hide anything. I will share with you the outcome of the work I am doing, and I want to give you a chance to see my mistakes and possibly even criticize me and let me correct myself. I also tried to convince them, look, let's just be serious about what you are trying to do, because maybe this is the only hope we have in our country. I can tell you most people are OK, a lot of people are good. We want a good thing to happen; even if some people are corrupt, they still want a good thing to happen. They can easily tell them. If something is—what is, you yourselves just agree, come along. I got as many journalists into it, into this work. I told them to be part of it. And that's one of the secret things, I think, that helped me to achieve results, because they believed me. Even though the Nigerian media is owned by those who I have prosecuted—maybe 60% of those who own newspapers in Nigeria, I prosecuted them. But every single Nigerian media declared me a man of the year at one point or the other. Simply because it was the journalists that were voting, not the owners.*

*I'm telling you, the strategy of how you can convince those who ordinarily will not believe these editorials, because politicians have done it, like you said. We are here to clean it, we are—and so on. So it helped me to get them. So that is the strategy that I have.*

BLAIR: So part of the media strategy was to get the media on board, but part of that must have been also to develop a public constituency for reform to get people on board.

RIBADU: *Basically.*

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BLAIR: Could you talk a little bit about the strategy for getting people on board?

RIBADU: *At the initial stage, I got the media, and then I progressively improved on that. I also decided to engage the civil society and religious organizations, and so on. I organized one unit within the EFCC, what we called the Fix Nigeria Initiative where we engaged the civil society and all others into like a sort of working together to help carry out all our common objectives, all of us. Most of them are fairly good, and they believe in those things that we are talking about. I shared with them everything that we were doing.*

*I also even set up a high-powered unit for some eminent Nigerians and gave them sort of authority to oversee and supervise the work I was doing, for them to advise and tell me what I am doing, whether it is wrong or right and correct me and so on. I also did it on my own initiative. So continuously I was out engaging the public one way or the other, never running away, never hiding anything. That's the whole secret. I'm telling you that the transparency and openness, it helps you to achieve a lot, especially in places like our own. If you have this mindset of opening up, whatever you are doing there's nothing secret. Chances are you will see what people will be lining up to join. People will not have difficulty in getting in and understanding what is going on and want to be part of it. I was doing it consistently, one after the other, continuously, and I was ready to talk to people. I do not remember—my own doors are open. Wherever opportunity comes for me to participate in anything, I was very much available. If you want to come and talk to me, let's talk.*

*But I deliberately refused to engage or involve myself with personalities of government, or traditional rulers, the culture of elitist engagement, where you visit a governor and then they would take pictures with you and you go to one traditional ruler and then you pay a courtesy call. That was not my idea of engagement at all. I wanted the opposite. I went to the people, the normal ordinary people and the media—the media is a good representation of that—and the civil society and the intellectuals, the students. All of them.*

*I think at one point I even suffered: people thought I wanted publicity, that I'm the type who—it's not so. It is just the strategy to succeed. I would not have achieved anything if I didn't do that. There's nothing you can do about it. It is not like you're trying to impress anybody, it is just to get your own goals, I mean achieve what you want to. It is a strategy to get results, to build all these building blocks of support and allies and so on. That's what I did. I did it to fairly good satisfaction. I did it not just alone. First and foremost also getting quality people who could make it possible for you to achieve that.*

*A few strategic people. It is very important at the stage of initial decision, you have to attract those who can just go along with you and deliver. It is very important. Some times it can be luck, but a lot of times it will depend on you. You will always know what is good and that you can shape things the way you like. The majority of people are average, can go either way, depending on how you put them. That's my belief.*

SCHER: Let me ask sir: you're doing all these things that, as you say, are shaking Nigeria; you're arresting the inspector-general of police. I mean these are big, bold actions. But that puts you at risk, and that puts your staff members at risk also. I mean, you're—

RIBADU: *Very much.*

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SCHER: You're angering, this is risky business.

RIBADU: *But that is what life is all about. Life is full of risks. You take a chance. Especially if we are going to confront a big problem. The problem of corruption in Nigeria was the worst ever we had ever faced. It was worse even than fighting for independence. You are talking about taking the country back from criminals and gangsters who control it and do what they like with it. It is worse than, for example, those who fought for independence from our colonial masters. The work we were doing, or we intended to do, is far more difficult. It is far more difficult than for those who fought against apartheid in South Africa. Far, far worse, I tell you. Because you can have a divided line of apartheid, people who are this and the others who are that, and this is ideal. This is about money, it is about resources, it is about a few people who have milked so much out of the system and continue to hold onto it, and they will not allow or let go. They are the ones who control the democracy, the so-called thing. They are the ones who control the economy. They are the ones who control everything, and we want to take it out from them. They are not going to leave you.*

*You might think a crooked kingpin who stole 20 million dollars from Brazil, and I came and took it away from him in a country where for \$50 you'll get killed. You'll get killed. I took 100 million dollars from the inspector-general of police. I took 200 million dollars from a fraudster. I took another 500 million from this one. The worst is—I'm telling you, for example those [Nelson] Mandela chaps, guys who fought apartheid in South Africa is worse, but then somebody has to do it.*

*The reason why I'm telling you this is that somebody must stand up to do it. There is no alternative. It is just like those who fought and got our independence, those who fought and defeated apartheid. Some of us will fight to defeat corruption and poor management in Africa now. That is what is going on now. This is the new face. This is the new chapter in our struggle to be human beings, to do things properly and correctly.*

SCHER: So how does this translate then into your everyday work? Are there steps you're taking to protect yourself and to protect your staff that won't compromise your ability to fight?

RIBADU: *You see, another thing that I found out is simple. I lost some people. Some people were killed in the work I'm doing, yes. It's OK, it's natural. Every policeman, if you sign in to do police work, your chance is you're putting yourself in danger. Or if you join the army, you know that you are fighting with guns. You are going to fight people who are also trying to kill you. So that is the first basic acceptance, you must take it.*

*Two, I found out that if you work honestly you have reduced the risk. Even the criminals, they respect you if they know you are honest about it.*

SCHER: Honest in—?

RIBADU: *Honest in the sense that they know that you are not doing it out of selfishness. They know that you are not doing it because you are wicked or you just want to harm them. They know that you are right and they are wrong. It helps greatly. I found out, clearly, that it depends on how you carry it out, but if you are a corrupt cop, your risk of getting knocked off is far, far higher than an honest cop. Because if you are a corrupt cop and you take money from somebody and you fail they will kick you out. So that helped.*

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*Also you must be professional, you take the basic steps to ensure that you survive. Don't enter into things that put you at risk. I didn't have a social life. I've never drunk in my life, never taken alcohol, so I don't go to any nightclub or bar and things like that. It helps also. I tend to tell my own staff also to behave. You are in a difficult job. Let's wait, and do it after we finish this job. But while we are here, we think we should put it as most important. Achieve results first. It also helps you to survive. Also basics: for you to understand the basics of survival as a law enforcement officer. All these are issues that you all have to put together. But most important, I think, is just to be an honest person. Really, it helps greatly. Because it is amazing that even those that I have really caused so much pain still respect me. But there are also others who tend to look at it in the worst extreme case. I have survived assassination two times. I had bullet wounds to my own vehicle—right now, the car is there—but I survived it.*

*There will be 1,000 or more people who have done so much that will probably want to kill me, maybe out of them 10 are the ones who will carry out—. So you must work to ensure that you survive these things. It is not a job for the faint at heart; you have to be very courageous, you have to believe in it. Personally, in my life, I don't know what you call fear. I honestly don't know what you call fear. At times I want to be afraid of something, I don't. For example, someone with a gun, I can go to him. I don't realize or really appreciate—yes, sometimes after it goes, then I will realize, oh you are a crazy man. But that is me. Someone will come and—pow! open the door, I will never shake, never. This is me, even when I was a child, never. It takes me time to even react.*

*So I think it also helps, your nature. Some people don't really take it. If you envisage or smell danger ahead of you, you will just not be there. But I'm not like that.*

SCHER: But then, do you ever look back now at all the things you did and think, maybe I should have been a little more fearful. Maybe I shouldn't have done that? Maybe I shouldn't have gone after that person or—?

RIBADU: *I looked up, I thought wow, that was great. [Laughter.]*

SCHER: Then I want to ask you about one thing in particular. This very bold move: you released this list of people running for political office or being considered for political office that you said were being investigated for corruption, and you put the vice-president on this list. So what was your thinking behind that? What did you see as the outcome?

RIBADU: *The point is, we thought that we were doing things that—I was not political at all. My loyalty is for my place. Typically in Nigeria or Africa, you tend to support whomever is close to you, your relations. This is typical of our politics. But there is somebody who is fairly, extremely close to me. We are from the same village, from the same place, but he was being investigated in the US and he is one of those that was investigated. We did not stop anybody, but we just came up with what we then said that could help the political parties to understand—.*

*As of that time, we knew in Nigeria that we had political office seekers who were convicts in some countries. Nobody ever checked anything. Nobody bothered to know the status of individuals. This was the political parties—the public are never given the true picture of what is going on with their own. I felt that maybe I should raise this a little higher. I did not say nobody could contest, but I said that these are the cases that we had these guys. If the political party is entrusted, go ahead and field him. I have no power to stop anybody from contesting. If the electors*

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*want to elect someone like this, fine, but I think I owe you the duty, as the head of an anticorruption agency or a law enforcement agency, to make that available, especially in a country that never had it. We had people like James Ibori who are convicts, who served time outside the country and go back to our country and become leaders. So why don't we just improve this thing a little bit. That was all that I did.*

*The so-called governors' list: there was not really a governors' list per se. People would say it—it is just that while I was doing this investigation, the government took it—President Obasanjo took it seriously, and the political parties also, a lot of them took it seriously, and they were changing the names of the candidates, saying we don't want to present such a person. And it happens all over the world.*

*Even as I'm coming from the UK now, the UK is going through the same thing. I mean the so-called parliamentarians. The party is saying you cannot contest. This is exactly what I tried to do. It was the media that developed this in the UK; in our own case it is me. Just to improve the whole thing, and it helped to some extent. Unfortunately it backfired. Some of the things that happened are amazing, because that is the nature of corruption and how deep it is in our own country. Any little attempt to improve, to change, will have very stiff resistance because of this stronghold they have, literally strangling the country. They don't—how dare you say that such people should not go into public office, how dare you, and they lynch you after that.*

SCHER: You got some support on this list from the Election Commission, because they advised parties that names that appeared on this list, these people shouldn't run for office. Am I correct in saying that?

RIBADU: *No, but I feel what happened was that there were some that the party, the PDP [People's Democratic Party] removed from their own and the NPP [Nigerian People's Party], that is the main opposition party, also changed. There were others that they refused and they went to court. In the case of Atiku Abubakar—he was the one, I think, the INEC [Independent National Electoral Commission]—it was the PDP and the government of Obasanjo, they came up with a list of those who were indicted by investigations. For example, I think indicted by the US—it was from the US, not even we. For example, DSP in the UK, so many others. Others were indicted by some commissions of inquiry in Nigeria. Others were part of the investigations we were doing.*

*So the federal government came up with a gazette of those who were indicted by various organizations for corruption. It is in our own constitution, the constitution of Nigeria, if such a gazette, if such a person should not contest elections. But they went to court and the court said they can contest. That's the end of the story, they contested. The VP contested. But the VP can't come to America today. If he comes to America he goes to jail.*

BLAIR: We talked a couple of times about things that have made important people very angry. Do you have strategies that you used when the list was released, or some of these other programs that really made top people, top politicians angry, to deal with them?

RIBADU: *This list was—originally it came, but it was not me that did it, it was the federal government that set up the panel and did it and so on. But arising from the work we did. I still stand by what I did, it is a very good thing to help change. But while we were doing it the National Assembly also called me to come and give them a record of the investigation that I was doing in respect of—particularly they were*

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*interested in the governors and so on. I went before the Senate, and I made the presentation. I said this is it. This one we have a case against, this guy we're investigating, this one—. All of it, these people do have immunity and we will not be able to prosecute them now until they are out of office. That is all. But of course people picked it up, and it became a political issue. A lot of people are angry about it, extremely angry, but what can we do. There is no alternative to it.*

SCHER: So how did you respond, or how did you direct your staff to respond, if somebody important called you up or showed up at your office and was very angry with you or your staff?

RIBADU: *All of them knew everything I said was true. None of them could challenge directly, but they were just collectively angry that we were interfering with the whole political process. But nobody will come and say you are wrong. None. Every single one of them understood clearly what happened. But in spite of that you can't stop me. "We are all like this, so why should you single me out?" or things like that. These are the issues that people were talking about.*

BLAIR: But they didn't call up their party leadership and have the party leadership call up Obasanjo and get people at the highest level?

RIBADU: *Obasanjo did well in that regard, to be honest. I think the whole mistake of Obasanjo was simply because of the leadership that came after him. If it had continued, all these things would have been solved, but he got it totally wrong by the person he chose to succeed him. This has caused a total collapse of everything. Everybody is out now with vengeance.*

SCHER: So we've spoken about a number of different things that you were able to do, very bold things, very different things that affected many different areas of Nigerian political and social life.

RIBADU: Yes.

SCHER: Were there things that you wanted to do or particular strategies that you wanted to adopt that you weren't able to?

RIBADU: *A lot of it—we were not political, personally, and I think it is a difficult thing, because as law enforcement it is so difficult for you to get into politics. Without changing the political thing it is not easy for you to change the other part. It is a very difficult tricky way. What I mean is, you can't afford to be involved in politics. We refuse to get involved directly. For example, the work of the INEC [Independent National Electoral Commission], we should have done something about it. For example, the political parties, we should have done more. But then the whole thing was so much and overwhelming that the work was too much. You can't do everything at the same time, you can only do that much. But incrementally you will continue to improve.*

*Unfortunately, it could not have been done within a short period of four years. There would be a need to continue. Then gradually you would get to a point where you would have done all directives. Unfortunately, it stopped with this new leadership and the reverse took place.*

SCHER: So looking back at your time is there something that you think was—I mean, obviously you have many, many successes—but was there particular success that stands out as something you're perhaps the most proud of, or something that

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is perhaps your legacy within the EFCC? Any particular agency or particular group or something like that?

RIBADU: *That I'm proud of?*

SCHER: Something you consider your biggest success.

RIBADU: *One thing? Just to prove it can be done, that change is possible. I think we proved it, we showed that it could be done. Actually corruption can be fought and that it may succeed. Then given a little hope that it is not all a hopeless case. Maybe there is a chance, after all the work we did.*

SCHER: We sort of touched on: the support for these initiatives that you put into place has waned. Where did things go wrong?

RIBADU: *Leadership.*

SCHER: Just the leadership?

RIBADU: *One single leadership?*

SCHER: One single person.

RIBADU: *One single person. Most important, everything. One single office, one single wrong thing, and destroys everything, it is Africa. Or it is the developing world. That's how we are. One single—it is like the same thing that Mobutu was doing to, it is like the same thing Mugabe is doing to Zimbabwe. Probably it is exactly what [Jacob] Zuma will do to South Africa, wait and see.*

SCHER: I really hope not.

RIBADU: *I'm telling you, it is not, unfortunately—we hope not, but you do not rule out the possibility. It is the same thing this guy is doing to Nigeria. One single person. You know it is such a pathetic case in Africa that one person, as he goes, the parliament will go along. The judiciary will go along, everybody will come. If he is good, the others will be good. If he is bad, all the others will follow like that, it's Africa. Today, the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe can never give a judgment against Mugabe. The Parliament of Zimbabwe can never—that is how it is. It is the same thing with, for example, in Nigeria today. The judiciary that we were able to get to deliver 200-and-something convictions, not individual but conviction cases, completely turned the other way around. The parliament that did so well under Obasanjo, that stopped him from the third term today—look at the performance of the parliament. Look at it critically.*

*That is what is going on right now. One single office, that's it. It is tragic, it is unfortunate. It makes me also believe that even the work we did can only survive if there is good leadership. Once something changes, everything collapses and it goes back to square one, or worse still, worse than before, because it is worse if you attempt and fail. Then it becomes a bigger problem. Unfortunately this is the sad case of Nigeria, a very sad case.*

SCHER: Do you think there are any strategies that people like yourself could pursue so they're not so susceptible to one person? I mean, do you ever think what—?

RIBADU: *You first need the one good person up there to do that. You need a good person. Now, if you get a good president of Nigeria, he would change all this and he*

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*would be able to set the standards where everything will work properly and correctly, but you need that person. This is the starting point. It is so important. Those outside may not understand it or realize how it is, but it is so.*

SCHER: It is all about leadership, no substitutes.

RIBADU: *No substitutes, because we don't have systems, we have nothing yet. So we rely heavily on individuals, especially where the power resides, and that is it. You can take and do and undo. You can destroy until they can't do anything. It is so sad.*

SCHER: So can I just ask you, for the record, how do you respond to the criticisms then that you were—I mean I've come across these things, they're somewhat derogatory and I don't like to repeat them.

RIBADU: *Go ahead, please.*

SCHER: That you were Obasanjo's Doberman, going after his political opponents.

RIBADU: *Yes, they would always say things like that because it fights back. When you fight these guys, they fight back. The usual thing is to bribe you so you don't do it and you will be like them, but they couldn't do it.*

SCHER: They tried?

RIBADU: *How many times. You know every single person I investigated attempted to bribe me one way or the other, every single person. But they will try to also attack you on some other things, maybe social. They couldn't get anything. They will try to attack you on some material thing, they could not get it. Well, at least I can say you are a dog of Obasanjo who wasn't just the president of Nigeria. You can call anybody in the government of the US today and say oh, this is a—*

SCHER: You can.

RIBADU: *He is the president of Nigeria. But I, the person who they are all calling his Doberman, I sent his daughter to prison. Yes, I sent his daughter to prison. So I'll just leave you with that.*

BLAIR: Could you talk a little bit about the leadership that you did have, about Obasanjo and your relationship with him? There must have been some work that you did personally to convince him to be on your side on some of these reforms.

RIBADU: *He is fantastic, he is a good person. He understood clearly the need for the reforms. I think he was the type of leader who if given the chance and has good support may do wonderful things. Tragically I think he was surrounded by very wrong people in the early first stage of his administration. The second administration, there were some better hands that came in, and he allowed them to do the work. Honestly, I mean, he is also a very espoused person, fairly good, very patriotic Nigerian. He is wonderful, I have no doubt about it. All those things that I have told you now would not have been possible without him. He is behind it. That is why I talk about the leadership. Leadership matters so much.*

*In the whole of this thing, you should first give credit to Obasanjo. Without him it would not have been possible. He saw what we did and he bought in, and then agreed and supported it. That is what made it possible for us to do what we did. But we failed in the transition, and that has reversed everything.*

BLAIR: What happened to allow him, at the transition to his second term, to switch the people that were in government? What led to that?

RIBADU: *I think it was part of the political majority. I think the second term was a bit different. Those who supported him, I think he didn't need their support again. It was his, I suppose, final term, what was supposed to be. Also, I think he wanted to leave a legacy and do it properly and correctly. He is smart enough to appreciate the fact that there is need to do good things to leave your name and change the country. He is not bad; he is a very good person. And also luck I think.*

*For example, he didn't know me by chance, by accident. If I wasn't the one that headed the EFCC, no one would have heard the name of EFCC again in Nigeria, I can tell you, take it from me. There are several government agencies today in the country, you don't hear their names. He did not go out to identify me himself. Whether he knows a little bit about the other people who participated—but I don't know if that also, really, was the case; most of them were, I think, by accident. Also they were not the professional politicians. They were more or less politicians by calling who somehow found themselves doing the work they did in the political environment. It was a combination of several factors like Obasanjo being a good person, meant well, also smart.*

*But, for example, all the anti-corruption initiatives, I did it. He didn't tell me, go and do this, never.*

SCHER: But did you understand that he was supporting you?

RIBADU: *Oh, too much. He was like in love with me about that. He liked me, he supported me genuinely. Because he knew it was a good thing for the country.*

SCHER: So did you feel you had some high-level protection?

RIBADU: *Oh, yes. I wouldn't have dared do anything without that. I could not have succeeded without that. I must concede to him that. That's why I keep on telling you that leadership is everything.*

SCHER: So we've spoken a lot about leadership. Are there any other particular problems that you've observed in your work that really subvert the efforts of good people such as yourself and some of the others you've mentioned trying to make a difference, or is it—?

RIBADU: *It is a continuous struggle, you continue to fight. At every step there is going to be resistance. I said that the fighting is far more difficult, more complex than all the other problems that the continent faced before, either fighting apartheid or getting independence, because these are our own people who make money out of the system who want to continue to remain. They will fight. Every single person you find in public office is making a benefit out of it, and they will fight you back if you try to stop it. So every step that we took was a big problem, a huge resistance. So there are so many various of such—. But like I said, if you are the one who is going to do this, you must be strong and understand the rules of this fight, and you must continue to fight.*

*Most important is the support of the president. If you get it, oh my goodness, two-thirds of your problems are solved, and that's what we got. That is what reversed after we lost it. Are you getting the analogy?*

SCHER: Oh, yes.

RIBADU: *We did it because of the support, and then we lost it because of the loss of the support—.*

SCHER: So what is the status of the EFCC today?

RIBADU: *If you hear from me, it may not be authentic. You need to ask people that. It may not be fair because I was running it, I was kicked out, another person is doing it, but I don't see anything happening there.*

SCHER: Do you have time for one more question?

RIBADU: *One more question.*

SCHER: Mr. Ribadu, we've taken a lot of your time this afternoon and we really appreciate it. We can see how sought-after your time is, so just to round out our interview, we'd just like to close on one last question. I was just wondering if when you sit here now in D.C. looking back at your time in Nigeria and your work at the EFCC, are there any things you wish you had done differently or any things you would like to have changed?

RIBADU: *That political leadership, that's all. Painfully, I have come to the conclusion that whatever work you do, as long as the head is sick in Africa and the developing country, the work will come to nothing because it all depends on this particular office. We ought to have done everything to ensure that we had got the proper person who would do the right thing for the country. That is the greatest of the great—well, it was beyond our powers. It was not something that we could do anything much about. But if I had power, probably that would have been the thing. It is tragic and it is very simplistic as well. But one office will make or [...], destroy or build, as we have seen in the case of Nigeria, tragically.*

SCHER: A somber note to end on, but thank you very much for your time.