



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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MAKGETLA: Excellent, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with us as part of our series of interviews with reform leaders and people engaged in reforms. Until very recently you were involved at the Commission for Economic and Financial Crimes or the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) and we would like to speak to you about your experience. I know your reputation is as a journalist. You have a very strong background from the (Sani) Abacha years and now you're a senior editor at Next. I'd like to ask you how you got to the EFCC, how you got involved and what your role there was.

OLORUNYOMI: *Well, in a sense it is a connection of dots for me. I left school; I had been a very active student at school in terms of community work and all that. Left school, went straight into journalism and again it coincided with the time in the history of our country when we were coming to a consensus that there had been enough military rule: it was enough of this. So it gave journalism a little activist coloration, if you like, so this led to a lot of reprisals. We lost many colleagues; many people ended up in jail. I served my own time too. Anyway, then I was forced into exile. In the years of exile I shifted away from journalism, core journalism to more human rights kind of work. So I was doing effective human rights work from the point of view of advocacy and teaching.*

*I would come surreptitiously—sneak into Nigeria and organize training sessions in different areas of human rights work. After the collapse of the military and the restoration of democracy or civil rule in Nigeria, anyway, it seemed possible to get back into journalism. But then I had been doing different types of work anyway. Mostly around media rights issues, human rights issues and so on and so forth. Then I went for a little course at the American University in Washington, actually: the College of Law, to do a human rights certificate course. I was trying to see the connection between corruption and human rights because it became clear to me that to really create some sense of order and progress in Nigeria, given its enormous potentials, we really have to be able to fight corruption in more creative ways.*

*So it was during one of these sessions that Nuhu Ribadu was invited to the congress, US Congress, to speak about corruption in Nigeria, and I was at the session. At break time we exchanged notes and spoke, and then he said, "Look, I think you should come back to Nigeria and join in this work." But you know, typically many Nigerian officials would want to see me, and many of them would invited me to come and participate in government, to come and do this and I thought, "oh, this is just one of those" and I didn't take it too seriously. Then he kept following up.*

*I remember my second son—one of those sessions, he was watching TV and there was this news about Nigeria and there something about Ribadu. I had spoken to my family about this invitation to go to Nigeria and my second son said, "You know you sit here in the whole comfort of America and you criticize everything, why don't you go and help this guy?" I didn't say anything but the very next day I wrote him. I said, "OK, I'm coming on this date, are you really ready?" He said, "Yes, come over."*

*I resigned my job. I left everything, and everybody thought I was crazy. I came to Nigeria. That's how I joined. So for me it was actually the continuation of a process that starts with journalism, connects with human rights and then gets into anti-corruption work.*

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MAKGETLA: Can you give me the dates? Which year was that in?

OLORUNYOMI: *That I joined? Of course I can give you the date. I believe it was 1 July. I can tell you that specifically, that it was July, and this was four years ago—that would be 2005, I think. I can confirm that for you.*

MAKGETLA: That's fine, I just wanted to get a sense of where in the reform period you entered.

OLORUNYOMI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: And your position as Chief of Staff, can you describe a bit what you did in that role?

OLORUNYOMI: *Actually I didn't come directly as Chief of Staff. I came in to set up what was called the education and crime prevention section. Up to that point the EFCC had run on a pure law enforcement track, never really carrying the Nigerian populace along. So citizen participation and ownership was very... anecdotal, almost—there was no direct connection, if you like. The Chairman, that's Nuhu Ribadu, was very keen to see that he went beyond the professional law enforcement program. He wanted a citizen program in which Nigerians could be part of this whole war, if you like. So that was the section I was hired to set up, and when I came I set it up. Actually I put everything in motion. I explained to him that I would need to hire more people to run this project. I invited a friend who had worked both in journalism and human rights. I believed he had a very strong passion for Nigeria. He lived in Canada at that time; his name was Chido Anoma. So I invited him. He also made the stupid decision and resigned his job, and he was on the next flight. He came to Nigeria and he said "OK, we'll run this shop together."*

*Along the way, when I wasn't even three months in this job, Nuhu said, "I think you should come up to the executive office and put some sense of structure here." Structure meaning policy direction. So the Chief of Staff, while really organizing his own direct staff and giving some sense of structure to his office, also doubled as a kind of policy director.*

MAKGETLA: Great.

OLORUNYOMI: *So the Chief of Staff job is actually a director's job. We had about five directors on the commission at that time; I was just one of them. So I supervised the prevention and education program, and I also drove policy from the chairman's office.*

MAKGETLA: In that context, in each of those positions, what do you see as some of the most important changes that you were able to achieve in that role?

OLORUNYOMI: *I'll tell you something. One is that, in fact, it is easy to measure what we achieved in terms education and prevention because we started it anyway. What we did is, first, knowing how huge the whole country is, we structured it about what we call seven baskets. We wanted to organize our work around seven baskets. So we chose to work with labor; we chose to work with young men that's youth; we chose to work with women, professional growth, the media as an institution, and then the faith communities.*

*Now with young people, we were able to start and promote what we call integrity clubs among a few secondary schools. We have a corps here called the NYSC*

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*(National Youth Service Corps); it is more like the Peace Corps. They leave college and then they give one year of service to the country. So we were working with this group and happened to set up integrity clubs all over—mostly it was just to speak about the value of integrity, to speak about what corruption has done to kill the country and things like that.*

*So that's there now and it has an interesting following which we can come back to later—it was a little bit beheaded after we left, but it's something that can always be built upon by whomever wants to do some kind of social change work.*

*Then with labor we started working on how to develop a national mechanism, a whistle-blowing mechanism, knowing full well that corruption always begins with workers. So there must be a fellow worker who knows something about what's going on, and we thought this was the most cost-effective strategy. Let's now partner with labor and help ensure, if we can just—all we need is to have workers become, if you like, some kind of informal army in the fight against corruption by being the whistle blowers. At least once at least they can identify wrongdoing, they can push the information to the law enforcement folks, and the EFCC can then trigger its own procedures.*

*We then worked with the faith community. I really treasured the work we did with the faith community. With Islam, we organized about a hundred Islamic clerics—it had never been done in this country. This is foreign to us because as someone later told Nuhu, they said "all this that you were setting up gave us the feeling that there is something beyond just doing anti-corruption work." So it seems that you invite elements in government to begin getting quite scared about all this. But you know, we set it up, and for the first time we had Islamic clerics and scholars talking not about this is from a Christian—they were now raising issues of corruption, which was very interesting.*

*Then among the Christian community we were mostly working with the Pentecostals, and that was a strategic decision because while the Pentecostals are a new movement in the country, they're always talking about prosperity—anyway, they attract young people, middle-class elements, some of them weaning themselves away either from frustration or whatever, from the conventional, large, traditional churches. So this is where people were, in a sense. That was our own formula, where you have people, people who are active, who want to do things. So we go there and then try to work on some kind of partnership.*

*So we had this program, what we called the 17-35 Project which is the—seventeen means ages 17 through 35. So in this project they would be working on crusades with them, doing church lessons, developing church instruments like lesson notes, and things like—all the things one does in church. We'd just seen that the template should be corruption because all books of faith have enough material on corruption. So the people in the 17-35 Project were the ones pulling all these things out and turning them into some kind of pedagogical instrument.*

*So this was what we were doing at that point. We also did some very interesting things, I think, with the professional groups. Don't forget we were just dabbling. You know, they were doing things on their own, but the kind of work—you'd be surprised, with the kind of work that we set out to do in the financial sector, all this nonsense that is happening in this country would never have happened. We were trying to connect—for instance, we would work with, say—we chose four or five professional groups.*

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*One was the real estate industry, because construction is where a lot of corruption happens. For money laundering purposes, real estate is a major, major avenue. So we were working with them. Naturally, we were working with the lawyers because, of course, they get to defend all these crooks. So we wanted to do some work with them, and that was interesting too, the lawyers' work. It was very uneven and it might also have caused some of our own problems, but that's it. Then we worked with the bankers, of course, with the bankers and the accountants, naturally. For instance, for bankers we tried to connect them to some of the Basel principles, the foundations upon which the modern banking ethics was based.*

*In that respect, what you could say was foundational in this respect was that we met at every session, we would have training programs, we would have—with all these professional groups. So if you were to ask for a summary of what all this meant, we would say that we would at least have to change the discourse. For the first time it was possible to really demonize corruption in this sense, and people would do it independently of us. Professional groups would organize annual meetings and the theme would be corruption and the principles of their profession. They would call us. So I think in terms of saturating the landscape with at least the ideas and, if you like, the principles of anticorruption, we were able to—we were at the water's edge and we just kind of tilled the ground a little bit. Certainly there was not enough time so we couldn't really build that much, but at least—I would say that was it, from that point of view.*

*From the policy point of view, there was a lot of work to be done at the chairman's office. He really happened to steer both law enforcement forces and the populace, and worked with state governments, with particular agents like the Accountant General's offices. The points where corruption—we were able to use the infrastructure of the state itself to compel certain practices that at least have to ingrain transparency and some sense of integrity in how government works.*

MAKGETLA: Did you feel that you were able to engage them sufficiently to help people to implement—?

OLORUNYOMI: *We had tremendous help, believe me. We had tremendous help because of course, we never came in being opinionated. We just said "look"—what we did was to conduct all the research; we showed the hemorrhage of resources the nation was having. It almost needs—it's a no-brainer. You can see where we are as a nation in light of the potential of this country. So you almost didn't need to convince them that much. So if you could place it—and remember, I worked with local governments. Initially when we were trying to work with local governments and we were saying "look, this is the most important tier of government because you are closest to"—Initially they were very angry because people also had spoken ill about local government officials. So they thought that was the perspective we were coming from.*

*We said "no, listen, it's just important that local governance set the example. So let's sit down, let's do things together and you'll be surprised." I really found our local government was fascinated with this work, and then they would come back and give you tons and tons of information. "This is the amount of money stolen, this is how things are done." So at that point it seemed possible that some important change could happen. But then—*

MAKGETLA: Can I ask which offices within local government you were working with?

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**OLORUNYOMI:** *Well, often we will work—Because you never really can get into—if you want support, you first have to work with the chairman’s office. But from the chairman’s office, different states—For instance, if you want to achieve much, in Lagos there is an office at the Ministry of Local Government and there is a committee at the local parliament which is—I’m trying to recall the name of this committee, but it is a kind of an appropriations committee. I think it is an appropriations committee, that’s the name.*

*So if you can bring the three of them together, and they agree with you to work on a joint work program—So it is clear that when say they want to build a road or something, they can have people to understand that OK, they want to do a road here. That had never really been done before. Then people would have to debate part of the budget. “Oh yes, but last year somebody said they were going to do this, they never did.” Yes, but now you are part of it, OK?*

*So the man from the parliament who also speaks that—we are here to provide oversight if they don’t do it. So we were able to at least create those kinds of mechanisms, but it is also about aligning to work with the executives, the bureaucrats who never really want things to happen. Then it is about working with the oversight institutions in the local parliaments, and bringing in the community itself to be part of the whole discussion.*

**MAKGETLA:** Great. You brought up a lot of very interesting things that I’d like to try to pursue and take off in different directions. So I think my next question engages something that you’ve referred to, which is how the EFCC was able to build support for the reforms that it was trying to advance. Internally, within the EFCC and working with higher levels in the federal government, but also down with local government and other groups that you said—lawyers that you were trying to talk to, your work may have perhaps also precipitated some opposition. Can you describe what strategies you had for bringing together supporters for the reforms? For local governments, you discussed bringing different parts of the committees and assembling together. Was there anything beyond that that you were very conscious about doing?

**OLORUNYOMI:** *Well, of course, one is always about doing our studies right: making sure that we understood the points of leadership, points of possible resistance and, you know, people who will be potential allies. Then we tried to work out our relations with each of these points, how to engage them. Of course, for those who will be allies or potential allies, you don’t have to do much because they will support you anyway, because this is the kind of message they’ve been waiting for. Of course, the problem is always about the traditional elites in each of these little conurbations, because they’re just waiting for you to come now and derail privileges, so they’re really going to fight. That’s the kind of thing I was discussing anecdotally earlier about lawyers. They just said “OK, you guys want to really shave off everything that we always enjoyed, right? So we’re going to fight you.” And they fought, very, very strongly.*

*In each of these—you also need to see whether you could build allies. For instance, when we were working with the faith communities, it just suddenly occurred to us that there are lawyers here who are Christians and want to do God’s work, if you like. So why don’t we now bring them in, encourage them to join our engagement with the lawyers?*

*So for the first time we found that we had this great opportunity where while we were speaking with lawyers who were always telling us “no, you can’t do this because the law doesn’t permit this,” we now had the other ones from their own*

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*community saying “no, wait a minute; this is how it should be, this is how it should be” So that’s one strategy, trying to work—looking for friends who otherwise are not working on this front but who have some kind of relationship that crosses over in some way to do the work.*

*The other kind of—actually, this was very helpful when we tried to do this work. For instance, if we were going on, to bring the resources of young people—I remember a performance in one of the states where we were having a meeting. We brought these two young kids, a young girl and a young boy, and after they just made a case for transparency, a case for anticorruption—there were all these tough guys who had come, and it was just so quiet because the kids were saying things like “OK, look at the schools that we go to.” Then we showed a picture of those schools. Why should kids in Nigeria go to schools like this and this and this? I mean, it was really touching.*

*So trying to engage those very emotional—soft if you like—parts of people was also a very helpful strategy that we deployed to enhance delivery of our message and therefore get support a little bit more support for our work here and there. Otherwise—.*

MAKGETLA: Some of the opposition that you encountered from these groups that you said were traditional elites that had privileges they didn’t want to see go away—what form did that opposition take? How did that affect the work that you were trying to do?

OLORUNYOMI: *One was that—look, most of the opposition we had came from lawyers, the media and, naturally, from accountants. These are the three greatest sources of opposition, I think. And it’s logical in a sense. We find ourselves—it became clear to us that we would never succeed with anticorruption work if we didn’t get the media on our side. But here was a big dilemma, because the media is almost—I think it was 97% owned by people that the agency itself was already investigating. So at the ownership level, the media is the bad guys, so we were going against the world on that count. I will tell you later how we tried to solve that problem.*

*For the lawyers, it’s very clear. You know, they have to cook up the books. They provide the defense and in a country without a tradition of enforcement over the years, they were just riding roughshod over everybody. So we said “OK, this has to stop.” So what they would do is to go to meetings and denounce the commission. They would also—we thought they were lying about this. They would also charge us of human rights abuses in very hysterical terms. I’ll also tell you how we responded to that.*

*Then the accountants would publish advertorials and speak about how we were trying to ruin business and how—if you looked at it on the face of it, it would seem that they were making sense, but you know, again—Now for the media, let me tell you quickly. First with this we couldn’t get our message across. We were hitting this brick wall. How are we going to do this? So we said “OK, we too understand that we have structures and layers in the media.” The guys really giving us trouble are actually the proprietors. Let’s go around them and speak to some editors who might be helpful or would like to be helpful to the country. Let’s speak to reporters, because at the end of the day, even if the reporter cannot get his message across with full support, he’d at least try not to distort our message.*

*So that’s the way we started working: engaging more with editors, more with reporters and then also with the influential columnists. We would bring them to*

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*sessions and show them “look, this is what is happening. So forget what you guys are saying.” We understood that there was a realm of reporting; we understood that there was a realm of opinion writing. So we tried to work with all these groups and I think the best way—what worked best for us was just to compile: make them just see it, look at the cases, look at the case files. “You go check, you’re a journalist. Take this document. Go find out whether it is true or false. And a few of them actually did.” That’s how we were able to win the media away from some of those bad proprietors.*

MAKGETLA: Did you have one-on-one meetings or collective meetings?

OLORUNYOMI: *We were always having—you could not fall sleep. These people were doing this: you went for a meeting, then you rushed, you were always running around from one meeting to the next, providing evidence. So we would hold some meetings collectively, like when editors would meet—you know that they have annual meetings, quarterly meetings. We always made sure that we would have one session to explain things. But much more than that, we would do a lot of one-on-one meetings with them. There’s another group I was talking about here now.*

MAKGETLA: Media, lawyers and accountants?

OLORUNYOMI: *Yes, accountants. Accountants, they were so unlucky. At the point where they really ganged up to set up their own major opposition, something happened in this country. So it’s like conditions just worked for us. So we just moved in to say “listen, this is the point we’re making. You can be quiet and ethical and still do good business. In fact, you are now seeing the consequences of poor ethical practices: that is what has led to now, you are seeing it only in the sense that you”—which is the same thing that is happening now, as you can see, with all these bad banks audited by the same companies and accounting firms, the big time accountants. These were the ones we were fighting, and they are still responsible for the mess in the banks.*

*So it helped the younger accountants, the small firms to also say “no, no, no, come on, what’s this? How can you have all these so-called, the five big accounting firms, and you are the guys who actually are also auditing all the failing companies? There must be something wrong in your practice.” That just helps, you know, to nullify the whole opposition. So sometimes it is out of your work, sometimes it is about luck. You know, it works well.*

MAKGETLA: You mentioned engaging professional bodies. Did you work through them or did you have to circumvent them?

OLORUNYOMI: *No, it is always important to work through because if you ever try to circumvent then the idiots will remain and then they can really build an opposition to discredit to you. It is a battle, you just have to go to the battlefield and fight it out. You’re actually on a more solid ethical platform. So you’ll win, there are just heavy; you’ll probably a few casualties, but I think you’ll win at the end of the day.*

MAKGETLA: Did you have to make any bargains in engaging these groups, and what were they?

OLORUNYOMI: *No, the kind of bargains that came about was more in the area of investigations, but these were also legal things. You can plea bargain with suspects and then get lower sentences and things like that, after prosecution, of course. But that was it. So a few of these things were done, but it is all in the*

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*books. For one, in a sense there is the law of the EFCC, what is called the Act. You have all the instruments of the EFCC. So the Establishment Act actually allows you to do that. Then also some progressive states like Lagos have terms of their own— they have all started those kinds of practices, so that helped.*

MAKGETLA: My next question touches on something that you discussed earlier as part of your initial work at the EFCC, which is how you went about building public support or public constituency for change. So you described how that unit was set up to clearly build popular support and you described the groups that you worked with. Is there anything else that you saw as a strategy to get the public on your side?

OLORUNYOMI: *Well, it was clear to us that you really had to help the public understand all the—what we call the costs. So of course, the major strategy had to do with how to sell the costs of corruption. Because as long as you keep talking about this, even if you have allies, you just turn them into mere parrots if they cannot relate to it in existential terms. So we engaged many researchers and we got many of our own folks to do a lot of work in the whole area of cost of corruption. We made it sectorial. So it spread. So it was so easy to deliver the message after the initial resistance because people would go there and say “that’s true you know? This is true.” Then they would see how much had been stolen.*

*So it seemed to us that the first condition for any successful penetration was being able to get the message right, and the message was right for us only to the extent that we could zero in effectively in the fight against corruption, what it means for corruption to triumph in Nigeria in terms of cost.*

MAKGETLA: If the government regarded you as a government agency, was there any sort of natural suspicion that the figures you were giving them might be incorrect based on their past experience of government—?

OLORUNYOMI: *I think so, because this was said. We were challenged on many occasions. “Oh, no, no; you’re cooking up the numbers.” Sometimes we would just take ads and pages of work. We would ask some of the professionals and academics who have studied this if they wanted to weigh in on our behalf, and a good number of them actually did and put it in black and white.*

MAKGETLA: Can we talk a bit more in terms of the operational details of the specific reforms that you engaged on?

OLORUNYOMI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: So if you take the work you did in the educational unit, how did you—you went in there and it was your task to assemble people and you discussed how you drew on your friends who were qualified to bring them in. Can you maybe just take me through the steps of how you decided what talents you needed and how you would get them when you first came in, and then how you went about getting it?

OLORUNYOMI: *Well, immediately, I came and I—first day in office, I came in. The first week in the office was about trying to assemble the internal team I was going to work with. Here was this outsider, if you like, and everyone was looking. “Where is this one from?” So that was a major challenge. I remember that to help me run the shop the first two people I spoke to internally to ask if they would like to move through an inter-departmental kind of transfer, they said no, they weren’t going to. That was just when I called this young man to join me from Canada.*

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*Now for the talents that would be needed in my view. First you need someone with an activist background, one who really believes in social change and who of course has a clear sense of what corruption has meant. I thought it was also very helpful—at the end of the day I thought it was helpful that it was this guy who came from Canada who took this job because he also had seen how a modern society operates. He would come with some, if you like, justifiable anger. We can't build a society like this; it's not sustainable in Nigeria. So that was it.*

*But in essence most of the kinds of people we were looking for were people who could do advocacy, effective advocacy: that was a strong consideration. Then researchers, we needed researchers, many of them. Then we needed writers. These were the relevant capabilities. Then certainly we just needed a good manager, someone who could manage a process. That's the kind of internal team that we had to build. To launch, to announce ourselves in this society—people had become so cynical about this process, and they said "what are these guys up to again?"*

*I came up with the idea. I said, look, I think what we should do is to go for, if you like, people in the whole popular culture environment. That would help us to deliver this message sooner than we could ever do by ourselves. So our first, first we brought into our team all the big names in our own local Nollywood. So these are the little heroes in the community. We brought people from the music industry, young people who were doing great music. You could see that that's why the thing just moved very fast. I said, "wow, you have people like that, you show a kid here all these actors and actresses that they have always seen." Believe it or not Nollywood is really—then we also brought in two football (soccer) stars. In Nigeria, soccer is a drug.*

*So people would say, "what's going on? What is the relationship here?" But it is helpful because we made them ambassadors of the anti-corruption fight. So even after the launch itself if we had an event somewhere, we would ask them who would want to just come and say—"Want to endorse the anti-corruption fight and then make it into something like a five minute speech?" They were always obliging. So that's really—it really helped with a very quick penetration of the process. I would say that in terms of our ability to quickly connect, that was how we were able to go about it: through symbols and institutions that the community had already accepted as reference elements. Engaging with them and then also borrowing from their own resources to deliver our message.*

MAKGETLA: How many people did you have in your unit at the time?

OLORUNYOMI: *About—starting out we had about eight, I believe, and before I left—at no time did we have more than ten. But you see, we had a whole bunch of associates here like the people from the Youth Service Corps. We had built them into our program. So they were doing a lot for us.*

MAKGETLA: You described a vast array of activities that you engaged.

OLORUNYOMI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: How did your staff carry that out across the country? I assume, was this beyond Lagos? Can you describe to me how you managed some of those operations?

OLORUNYOMI: *OK, if we were to do something in, let's say—Nigeria has 36 states. After we worked out the plan in the office, OK, who will be our partners here? So engaging with those partners would take about a week. They would come or we*

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*would send folks, an advance team to work with them and all that. So the group—if we go to one of the very successful things we did, we have a state called Cross River State Calabar. I don't know. You have knowledge about Nigeria; it is just to give you an idea of the map of Nigeria.*

*Now Calabar is here, we are here of course in Abuja, Cross River State. This is where we first had our successful break into the Nigerian Bar Association, that's the lawyers, because we came here to launch a youth program. Then with the youth program we thought it would probably be nice if we could start engaging with the faith community. It was here that we found that among these lawyers we had these three guys who were very, very strongly religious. They're not pastors, but at least they're—They played along in how we started the work here in Cross River. Among the youth, that's the university group, we had a group we were working with. Then we had meetings with them. They helped to set up the networks.*

*When we came in, we came in for about a week. We just went around, moving around through meetings and meetings. By the time we left we had set up a group within the Bar Association of the state, we had set up a faith nucleus to help us coordinate with all the churches in Cross River. And then our youth group is already there, of course. So that's how it worked out to prepare it. It was also borrowing a little bit from law enforcement methods of work in terms of operations and planning and that kind of thing.*

MAKGETLA: How did you maintain that relationship over time with those groups that you set up?

OLORUNYOMI: *That's a major regret and probably a failing of the—I don't know whether it is a failure; the jury is still out on that. The thing about our strategy is the fact that OK, so we turned up all this energy and now what's happening? You know, it is really painful because they were right here. People would say straight to my face "so what's going on?" I said "I wish I could tell you. I don't know what's going on." People are so disappointed. I can't—I need to show you the kinds of things I get in my mail, every day. A lot of these people are upset. They're asking "is it the end of this?" I say "yes, but this is—I don't know how to tell them that we don't have the institutional capacity to do all the—Anyway, I don't know. It is difficult. But back then, because we had institutional support we were always able to—it meant a whole lot of work, though.*

MAKGETLA: What was your relationship to the governor and the government's office in the states?

OLORUNYOMI: *Not all, but many of them liked us. Many of them liked us, naturally. But there were these six governors that we were always working with. We could find out from our own operational team which of these governors seemed to be doing well, not really stealing money and things like that. They would say "this state, this state, this state and this state" and then we would—for instance, we were working with the current governor in Lagos who seemed to be doing something interesting. We were working with him on how he could be a center of some kind of—it's not an endorsement really, but at least—many of them were just doing nothing. They were just sharing the money. We just wanted, so that you could see that, you could do some of the things that these guys were doing. But we never got to do that.*

*We set up a committee between the governor, the state and ourselves, and did it. So it is suspicious because from an operational point of view, the EFCC was*

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*really always after their accounts. We would say on what they are spending and do auditing and all that. So officials were always very suspicious when you came to the state. But a few of them were quite open-minded about it.*

MAKGETLA: Great. One quick question before we move away from these issues of how you manage your staff. Did you have—well, actually, two things. First, what about training within your staff, was that something that you sought to develop?

OLORUNYOMI: *On training, we were lucky. Training was one of the biggest things because Ribadu made sure that 25% of allocation to every department had to go into training, training and training and training. People were training—so yes, people had a lot of training. We had to train them in advocacy. We had to train them in report writing. Train them in research matters. Then if we thought there was some kind of training that was not directly related to our work but had some relevance to the kind of group we wanted to establish, we asked them to just go and sit in.*

MAKGETLA: Did you have difficulty once you trained your staff in retaining them?

OLORUNYOMI: *Yes, retention was always a problem.*

MAKGETLA: How did you address that?

OLORUNYOMI: *Retention from the point of view of those who worked in the education program was not so much a difficulty, but retention in the main EFCC structure—it was a big challenge; it was hard. One, the private sector will pay them much more than we could ever offer. Two, the private sector will lure them with—and they could see career opportunities far beyond what they thought they could get here because even from the point of view of the universal jurisdiction, the whole money laundering law is a very new area of the law. So in institutions—take banks for instance: compliance officers in this area are in demand, the banks have been setting up compliance units, so if someone were to leave an institution like EFCC to go—if a given person couldn't be second in command or something, he would already see some kind of greater career opportunities in these places or some of these new credit firms, either credit rating or credit cards. So it is just—others were just snatching the staff left, right, and center.*

MAKGETLA: Was there anything that you could do to hang on to your highly trained staff?

OLORUNYOMI: *It is always hard; it is difficult. But one would hope anyway that they weren't—they would take new ethical practices to—that's just a hope.*

MAKGETLA: A lot of people have spoken about the difficulty that they faced when they tried to deal with the civil service who were still stuck in the old ways of doing things. Did you encounter that sort of bureaucratic resistance and how did you address that?

OLORUNYOMI: *Yes, it was there because to set up something like the EFCC you had to bring in people from different government departments, the civil service to transfer—to help build aspects of the institution, and we would keep them for some time before they could go back to their primary office. And they were so, so...God, so bureaucratic about doing things. You would say "OK, yes, but we have to do this." They would say "yes, but that's not how they do it in government."*

*I remember once because I would sometimes be liaising with the presidency, I would go to deliver messages, come by and say "we want to do this, this and this*

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*and this.” Sometimes we actually did things before making the presidency aware. They were never happy. We had the bureaucrats among us who said “you can’t do that. You can’t ambush the President.” I would say “OK, yes, we can’t.” But we would do it anyway. I mean, what the heck. You just have to try some things. So that’s it: sometimes you win, sometimes you don’t. If you just stick to what you’re doing and they see that you’re sincere about it, I don’t think you—you will probably prevail.*

*The EFCC achieved so much in such a short time and it is because of that kind of attitude that “no, I’m not going to let the civil servants just break the whole place.” If you look at it from this perspective, this was the EFCC: OK, take one of the core missions of the EFCC, which is just to prosecute economic and financial crime. In the sense of what we define as crimes of corruption in this country, before the year 2000 there had only been one conviction in this country since 1960. Now, in 2000 the government sector created the sister agency called ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission) and then the EFCC came in 2003-2004.*

*Now between 2000 and 2003 ICPC was able to prosecute five cases because they were just talking about all these civil service, bureaucratic things. But just see what has happened in the four years of the EFCC: it was able to get about 300 convictions. You couldn’t achieve that just by pushing files and doing all these silly things. No, you have to just think outside the box and then move and move. So it is always there. You should see it. Sometimes it is because they want the process to work; yes, that’s true. But sometimes they can be so—they’re drowned by this and you’d better just work around them and get this done.*

MAKGETLA: You spoke about going to meet with the President and that being—the presidency and that being something that was not traditional. Can we talk about that? Because people have stressed that the President plays a very central role in the system and that his support is necessary for reforms to advance. How did the EFCC manage that?

OLORUNYOMI: *It is difficult. True, one you must bear in mind that nowhere has anticorruption work succeeded if there is no political will. In fact, even today, a central area of focus in anticorruption studies is the area of political will, how to generate it, how to sustain it and things like that. So that’s one point. In all kinds of society where, you know, the rules are a little bit foggy and institutions are still very weak and the rule of the big man is still very dominant, then it is so easy for the presidency or executive power in general to just do things.*

*Now from a law enforcement perspective the question is how do you balance without then becoming a mere handmaiden of an institution like this and then, as a result, abuse the Nigerian people and their experience of what law enforcement should do. The second point to remember is that in law enforcement, especially as work of the executive branch, at the end of the day you are accountable to—say, the Attorney General is accountable to the President.*

*Sometimes you have the parliament that is just, let’s face it, no more than a one-party state that you’re running. So you have to just articulate all this very clearly in your mind and then just see how you navigate. It is very treacherous, I must say.*

*I have been at sessions where the President, that was Obasanjo when he was there—how he would quarrel with Nuhu Ribadu about things and how I always*

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*thought, you know, if I was the one I'd probably just dump this job and walk away. I remember once when—because Nuhu Ribadu always needs to go to parliament and account for our work every year, sometimes they called him to the National Assembly and the Senate. So on this day he was going there, and the President knew he was going and was calling Nuhu Ribadu to advise him. You know, you can't go there and just say "governors are corrupt, governors are corrupt, this governor is corrupt."*

*Now, what the President—I don't know, I am speculating at this point. I think what the President meant was that you must find a way not to create too many enemy fronts. And that's true. Because if you open up too many theaters of war, you get so easily consumed. That is probably what happened to us, anyway. But there are just some wars you must fight. There are some battles you must take on. But, if you open too many fronts, you can't deal with it.*

*So I think the President didn't want him to mention any of the governors and just go talk about your work. So he's arguing with the President "no, no, no, you have to tell the parliament that these people are corrupt" and that one says, you know, he says, "no, no, I am warning you, I know this better than you." Have you met him before?*

MAKGETLA: I haven't.

OLORUNYOMI: *Okay, he's arguing and arguing with the President. The President really loves him too. You know, they have this fight and some kind of – which is partly why it also worked too well for him. I think he always looks at him like some kind of strange wild kid. He's like my son. I mean, imagine: "No, Mr. President. Mr. President, I think these governments are so corrupt." So you need to take—he was just really now - he said, calm down. You can't go there and just reel out all these names. You haven't even completed all your investigations. He would say "yes" but you know in law enforcement you can't complete an investigation—you just tell them to wait.*

*Anyway, he asked for my opinion. I said "I think you probably should say a little but you can't say everything." The man went there and just mentioned all of them. You need them, for the next three months that's all we're dealing with. The next day the papers were saying "oh this government"—then the opposition to the governors, the governors, everybody: they were on our neck. "This agency wants to destroy governors, wants to destroy the nation." That kind of thing.*

*It happens. So it is also for us to manage those kinds of things. It's not easy. I swear to God, it is not easy at all but—.*

MAKGETLA: If you look at that balance between individuals and institutions, you described it now in terms of the presidency, but what about in the EFCC? A lot of people associate the work that it did in that period with Ribadu's personality and his determination, as you described, his energy.

OLORUNYOMI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: How do you think that balance was struck? Do you think that it was to the benefit of the organization in achieving a high profile? What do you think about its implications for the institutions and the systems of the organization?

OLORUNYOMI: *The thing is, no doubt his personality helped to define the kind of work we did. He is so single minded about his goals. He is just going to go ahead and*

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*he has almost no notion of fear. I have never seen a guy like that. I mean, in his DNA the word fear just doesn't exist. So if look at him he is as meek as a lamb but he would be seated and you couldn't even stare—then he would create the greatest commotion in the world. So that's one anticorruption fight. In a country like Nigeria you really need that, no doubt about it. You even need ten times the energy. You know, the kind of adrenalin that drives Nuhu, you really need that.*

*Now, the reverse of it is of course that if you take a man like that out of the system it will seem like you have a great dip in the work but I don't think so. I think at the end of the day, his own style may be peculiar but all he did is just going by the laws. And there's the point. The laws against any wrongdoing we may want to do have been established in this country since 1960. The problem is enforcement. Nuhu just enforces; that's it. So I really don't think—I know that personality comes in. I think a man can be quiet and still get the job done; just insist on enforcing the law. It is right there, just—Enforcement is the missing link in everything we've done. That's all that Nuhu did.*

MAKGETLA: Great. Just a few more, thank you very much for your time. You discussed earlier how some of the opposition was somewhat institutional, people whose professions would lead them to sort of come head-to-head against the EFCC's work.

OLORUNYOMI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: What about people who were actually benefiting from corruption? The people who might have paid off the accountants, who were paying the lawyers. How does their opposition affect the work of the EFCC, and how did the EFCC respond?

OLORUNYOMI: *It was hard because some of them are outside-structured institutions. They were probably contractors or they would just be fronts and had access in the communities. So they were mostly—the dangers they posed to the EFCC—as I reflect back on this, the way I look at it now is that they really have to promote that bad image. They were putting out propaganda against the mission of the EFCC and they would say things like “the taxes that the EFCC uses are against the taxes recognized by our laws.” They would say that the EFCC is an institution that has become something like a Gestapo organization. They'd say something like that. “You put people in detention well past 48 hours.”*

*You know, once you say this and—of course, the EFCC was going after very, very powerful people, so that tends to just generate a life of its own and then people really believe it. Because actually there was a day when my own sister asked me “why are you guys holding people past 48 hours?” I said “where? Give me just one example.” It's not true. I said “no, people are just saying it and it's not true.”*

*I have friends who call me up and ask why we were holding a certain guy. I would tell them we were not holding that person. Then they would say “but the news is everywhere.” I would tell them to be careful about what they repeat. It's not serious. With some people you'll be shocked; they may be very well meaning. There's a guy who is actually a priest who has worked with us. He called me up one day and said that our job was going to be difficult because we were doing things this way. I asked what he meant and he told me that we had gone after XYZ yesterday and some of his church members were saying that was not acceptable. It was said we had detained innocent people. I said “don't worry. I'll address it but please just give me like thirty minutes.” Then I just sent some*

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*operational staff to take him, show him around the office, the cells, everywhere. I asked who had told him that rumor and he just said it was somebody.*

*So you can't do much against this kind of thing. You just have to keep doing, expanding your own constituency of allies: that's my own approach to it. You can't even do it yourself. But as soon as you can insist on community ownership of this process, forget it. So that's where you should put all your efforts.*

MAKGETLA: Were the powerful opponents of the EFCC able to do anything more than this publicity campaign against the EFCC? Did they operate in the National Assembly to generate opposition, or the governors—

OLORUNYOMI: *They did, they tried to cut—I mean the appropriation to the EFCC. They held it back at the time. There was a crucial time when the EFCC was going to target the political class. Because if you look at the progression of its work it started with those who damaged the image of the country, most of these boys who do credit card things. So it went after them and then moved from there, moved to the banking hall to try to just clean all this bad—they felt that we had this issue with failed banks in this country. So for those powerful bankers that nobody could touch, we just put a few of them in jail. Things like that. The people saw it. The EFCC never had a problem until we started attacking politicians. Even the Parliament, our local and national assembly was actually praising the EFCC while we dealt with the 419 boys and all these bankers. Then when the EFCC went after the first two ministers, they were worried.*

*Then the police chief, God—he just said “these monsters are coming after us.” So that year the EFCC budget did not pass. Remember that was the year that Wolfowitz the former President of the World Bank, gave us a lifeline. The World Bank appropriated some money to help our operations. At least I remember that very well.*

MAKGETLA: So that was how you made up for the shortfall?

OLORUNYOMI: *Yes, that was how we made up for the shortfall. Beyond that the opposition also tried to change the laws. They just said “this institution is too powerful, let's write the”—which they are trying to do now. Actually they've done it, they haven't passed it yet, but they've rewritten the EFCC laws to apply when the current legislation expires.*

MAKGETLA: What did the EFCC do in that context?

OLORUNYOMI: *There is nothing you can do when Parliament wants to override what you do. I mean we were able to do so because we built a civil society opposition against them. But now I don't know—they've just done nothing, but then again they couldn't have done much. We made it impossible for them to do it.*

MAKGETLA: When you look at the work that you did at the EFCC, do you think there was anything in your own background, in your history, in your management style, that helped you to do the work that you did, first in the educational unit and then more broadly as Chief of Staff?

OLORUNYOMI: *Well, in terms of my passion for the job is just because I've come through that process as a young person from school and also from a church family. I haven't been to church in 25 years. But anyway, these issues concern family values for me, so it is just kind of appropriate. But then it also helped that I was always involved in some kind of youth organization, doing the Boy Scout*

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*movement, even as a very young kid in Nigeria. I had an early start with things like that. So it came together very well. But there was also school and then—you see I also—for me in particular, school, especially college—I went to school at the time when this country was at the junction of so many things. The South African—You know, I was the one manning the ANC (African National Congress) office here in Lagos. I was the office boy when [Indecipherable] and [Indecipherable]—I would go pick the check for them and bring it back here.*

*So I came out of that whole tradition. The South African independence just came to a head; Zimbabwe had just held its election. Then you had opposition to military rule. You really had to be extremely silly not to be part of the current that wants to be part of the change. The problem I see with people like us is that things have not turned quite the way they probably should have.*

MAKGETLA: Several people have pointed to the need for a reformer to have a vision or a story line to help the community move forward and to galvanize around a common agenda. How important is this in your view?

OLORUNYOMI: *Extremely, extremely important. In the Nigerian case it is the same. I mean you had many parallels. You have Nigeria, Malaysia and South Korea that started around the same time, they have almost the same GDPs, contemporary independences, almost same levels of development and school enrollment. All the indices were about the same. Just look at us now. I mean yes, those stories are the kinds of stories that can help to move forward. So yes, it is very, very important for institutions and, again, for people.*

MAKGETLA: Again, thinking about this process of broad change in development, in your experience, where do leaders get ideas about the options available to them, and where do they get information about the approaches to take? Based on your experience, where did you get ideas?

OLORUNYOMI: *The ideas came mostly from abroad, actually. Yes, there are some local ideas, but cross border ideas are what matters at the end of the day.*

MAKGETLA: Can you give me an example?

OLORUNYOMI: *Yes, I mean, for instance, we had to borrow a lot of examples from South Africa in this regard. Ghana, in many respects, Ghana. Nigeria hates to acknowledge it but a lot of the best examples we have in everything are from Ghana.*

MAKGETLA: Can you give me an example of what kind of idea you're referring to?

OLORUNYOMI: *OK, even how an anticorruption agency should be structured. South Africa was a very, very good example. Also how to organize—. Anticorruption is a very broad thing to say, corruption—you're talking about bribery and so on. This is global. The money laundering aspect of corruption is very new in the sense that it came about with the digital revolution, in terms of just how you work through the whole wire service, work through the banking system, move the money to launder it either in real estate or set up the whole car lot or huge supermarket. People don't know about this, you really have to borrow this example. These are examples that have come from—South Africa has very, very fascinating examples in this regard.*

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*Beyond that we were working around issues of political corruption, Ghana was just the best example you could go to. They had an excellent electoral management program. So just one second [end of file one]*

MAKGETLA: So our program helps leaders share experiences and innovations in addressing challenges that might arise in building new states. I've been wanting to know if there is anything that you think we've missed or anything you would like to add in that context?

OLORUNYOMI: *I think pretty much you've covered it. I don't think so.*

MAKGETLA: Is there anything that you, coming in as a reformer into the institution, would have wanted to know, something that you'd want to tell other people in a similar position?

OLORUNYOMI: *Well, what I think most people coming into the reform environment will always face is just how the resistance—how they will deal with sources of opposition and the kind of resources they need to be able to stabilize. For sure, I never assumed the kind of opposition—both internally and then certainly externally, the people who really resisted reform. So what kind of support the reformers might need would be resources that help them to understand how to engage more, or at least how to be able to dissolve opposition through all the challenges you face, even promoting your agenda. They wanted hot seats the most. It is just when the opposition—and I'm not even talking about opposition in terms of an institution. This may actually be specific actors, the kind of actors you face and how you have to deal with them. That's one area I think—and if you look at it, even at the top executive level, you also see that that's the kind of problems that most reformers face, and they don't always know how to handle it very well.*

*They eventually enter into some kind of tradeoff, which often diverts—the reform process stumbles. Sometimes, almost completely. So these are—I don't know; you guys are the professional academics, perhaps there are things that you do about stuff like this, short of training—probably more fellowships among reformers, I don't know whether that makes sense.*

*If Mr. X is doing here and here and here and here, bring them together just so that they know one another, so that they have time to meet. If an institution brings them—you know, for instance, I'll tell you something. Before we left I insisted that everything we do we'd better do on suffrage basis. So I'd try to convene meetings. So we'd try to convene meetings for police chiefs who were working on money laundering issues across West Africa.*

*If you don't do that, you don't know what the Ghanaian guys encounter, what the guys in Guinea—they have different political, economic, cultural differences and it impacts on our work the way we do it. Even in the kind of civil society that provides them a welcome platform to do their work, there must be meetings and exchanges of notes. So that kind of sharing of experiences is mostly a mechanism to do that, and I don't know who can do that. But that's very helpful. Then documenting all those things and making sure they are available for people to—Probably, I don't know, probably.*

MAKGETLA: Thank you very much for your time and for your thoughts. I think from our perspective this is the kind of sharing that we're hoping to enable by getting your experiences—by making them available to other reformers.

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I have just been speaking to Mr. Dapo Olorunyomi, Senior Editor of Next, former Chief of Staff at the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. It is 24 August 2009.

Thank you again for your time.

*OLORUNYOMI:*        *Thank you.*