

THANK YOU GOVERNOR BABATUNDE RAGI FASHOLA

By Joy Nwosu Lo-Bamijoko

I was in Lagos again in 2008/2009. This time, I had enough time to take a closer and good look at the city of Lagos. What I experienced is recorded below

LAGOS AS I SEE IT TODAY

Barely a year after I returned to Lagos and left in a hurry, I came back again, this time for a longer stay. The plane landed at night again and, all I could see of Lagos were patches of lights, and patches of pitch darkness.

As we walked out to the check out points, I started noticing some change. There was order. The check out lines were moving faster, and the custom's men were actually behaving quite professionally. I looked around to make sure that I have not landed at the wrong airport, but everything else showed that I was at the right airport, in Lagos, Nigeria. The lights were dim, and so the walking stroller was shut down. The baggage carriage was suffering from a bad bout of hiccups. The whole place was dingy. For one who just left sparkling international airports, "yes," I said to myself, "this is Lagos."

Outside the airport, it was also quiet and orderly. No hustling and bustling. My niece Lati, and her driver Adam were there again to meet me. My first question to her was,

"What happened here?" and surprised she said,

"What do you mean?"

"How come such order around here?"

"Oh" . . . she laughed, "we have a new governor and he is trying to clean up the place."

If he can do this, I thought, what stopped all those other governors before him from doing the same?

Although it was night, the street lights on the airport road were working. I did not see those broken down abandoned vehicles that littered the road, and traffic was moving faster. When I mentioned this observation to my niece again, she simply said,

"All credit to our new governor." "Okay," I said, "what is his name, his background, and what else has he done?" She laughed again, told me to be patient, that I will see.

That night, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) spoilt it for me. There was no light, and it was hot and sticky.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD OF LAGOS

Two days later, I decided to go out and see Lagos for myself. I saw beautification works going on. Men were planting trees and flowers. I saw women sweeping the highways. This created jobs for a lot of people. I saw buses, red and blue plying the streets of Lagos. I saw the Bus passengers looking relaxed and comfortable, with the exception of the over-crowded ones. Nigerians know how to spoil a good thing. The streets were still congested, and many roads still have potholes, and are in need of maintenance. However, the very next week after these observations, on my way to Lagos Island, I noticed that there were maintenance works going on everywhere on the Main land.

Every where I went, I saw the good and the bad of Lagos. The good being the beautification of the city, and the bad being how filthy we really are. The cleaning of Lagos should be the job of everyone living in Lagos, and we must start by changing our mentality on how our small actions can contribute to the bigger solution. That morning, I was traveling behind a car, when suddenly someone in the car in front of me opened the car window and threw out some banana peels, and the car kept going. I believe that a lot of us, at one time or the other, are guilty of this offense.

THE CULTURE OF CLEANLINESS

In Ghana, a few years ago, I marveled at how clean Accra was, and I believe still is. As my group was touring the city, a member of the group dropped a paper wrap on the ground. A little boy, quickly ran over, tapped him on the hand, and asked him to please pick the wrap and drop it in a nearby bin. The man obliged and apologized. The bin was just there next to where the man dropped the wrap. How did they get there? The little boy himself will tell you that the man at the top taught them to love their city, to be proud of their city, and to contribute their little bits in keeping their city clean.

The reason for the filth in Lagos is largely because of the absence of a culture of cleanliness amongst the people. If the government is working for the people, the people should be able to partner with the government in whatever the government is doing. The government should provide simple things like trash bins at strategic points on our roads, public rest rooms, manned by workers to keep them clean, and then drum it into the heads of the people the need for them to use these structures and to keep them clean . . . That reception I attended at the beautiful Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) Centre in December 2007, was marred by the fact that all around the halls were cesspools. You can see people easing themselves at the gutters around the halls, and the stench can only be imagined.

WORK IN PROGRESS

At Obalende, I noticed that the entrance from Obalende to the Third Mainland Bridge needs urgent attention from the governor. That big refuse dump under the Bridge has to go, and the traders all around the Bridge blocking the side roads under the Bridge must be relocated. I know that we do not expect the governor to change the whole of Lagos

over night, but there are places like Obalende, (thank God for Oshodi), Ikoyi, Victoria Island, and the Lekki Peninsula, places under the constant scrutiny by our international visitors that must always remain clean.

I was watching CNN, the other day, and learnt that a miracle was taking place at the Bar Beach, so I decided to see the place for myself. The last time I was at the Bar Beach was in 1999. I was so shocked then at how the Ocean had eaten up the Beach itself and half of the Ahmadu Bello Way that I stopped going near the place. I worried for the houses along the Bar Beach and wondered how long it would take before the Ocean swallowed those houses too.

Today, the rebirth of the Bar Beach is a success story. If the Bar Beach can be reclaimed from the Ocean, I believe that Lagos can be reclaimed from the filth that is all around us. Take a drive through the city to see for yourself. I must commend the governor for the introduction of the refuse collection vans in Lagos. There should be a law making it mandatory that houses built on our major roads should follow a given standard, and should always remain paint fresh.

From Ikorodu Road to Ojuelegba Road, even Ajegunle has improved, we see roads that cry out for maintenance. The word maintenance is a culture that we must cultivate. Some areas of Lagos like Ijora/Seven Up, or Isheri/Magodo, where I live, seem to have fallen off the radar of the city of Lagos. Please Mr. Governor, come to Isheri/Magodo and help us. Pay us a visit. I know that if you do, the problem of bad roads, and who knows, that of the electricity may be a thing of the past. Visit Isolo/Seven Up too. The sight from the top of the Bridge does not make Lagos look too good, but please take under the bridge to see the need there.

KEEP LAGOS CLEAN

I must say this again. The problem of Lagos is also with the people living in Lagos. To achieve the aim of a beautiful and clean Lagos, Lagosians must work with the governor, and the Governor must work with Lagosians. If we want a clean environment, we must be clean ourselves, and strive to remain clean. We cannot overemphasize this.