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## Interview: Yakubu Bako

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# Development efforts in Nigeria's Akwa Ibom state

*Mr. Bako is the military administrator for Nigeria's Akwa Ibom state. He was interviewed by Uwe Friesecke and Lawrence Freeman in Nigeria on Oct. 9, 1994.*

**EIR:** I understand this is a newly formed state; what are the important things about it that we should know about?

**Bako:** Akwa Ibom state is one of the newer states; we celebrated the seventh anniversary on Sept. 27. Akwa Ibom is the number three oil producing state in Nigeria. We also support the federal government, in terms of production of crude oil. Apart from that, we have a lot of other industries; raw materials that are available here, in terms of farm produce; the federal government paper mill is here; fishing is also part of the potential in this state. Also rubber plantations.

**EIR:** Are there estimations of a large amount of potential oil still to be exploited here?

**Bako:** Yes. There are some of the oil wells that have been tapped and closed, to be reserved.

**EIR:** One of the claims that has been made is that the oil companies have come in, taken the oil, but have not helped out the local people and have not built the infrastructure to help out the people of the area; has that been the case here?

**Bako:** Since I've come, I've been trying to cultivate a good relationship between the oil companies and the people here. So far they have been assisting, helping to show that they appreciate that they are prospecting for oil in Akwa Ibom state, and they are giving some of the benefits to the community.

**EIR:** So, the oil gives you a substantial source of revenue which the state then has to make improvements with?

**Bako:** The oil revenue, as usual, goes to the federal government; whatever federal allocation we get, we use that.

**EIR:** So the state doesn't get any revenue?

**Bako:** Except in taxes, from workers.

**EIR:** I understand that this government formed an organization two years ago, Ompadec. What does it do?

**Bako:** Yes. We are feeling the presence of Ompadec this year, in terms of production of rural electricity, water supply, and rural roads. Last year, the impact wasn't much, because Akwa Ibom state was not designated as one of the oil-producing states; but since that was rectified this year, Ompadec is performing very well.

**EIR:** So you are now one of the eight states that falls under this Ompadec category?

**Bako:** Yes, we are one of the eight oil-producing states.

**EIR:** You brought up roads, electrification, and water. Could you tell us what plans and projects your state has for improvement in these areas of infrastructure, and what the problems are and how you are going to overcome them?

**Bako:** In terms of water projects, luckily we got an agreement with the ExIm Bank of the United States. Some of the equipment for rural water supply arrived, so we are starting provisioning of rural water through the loan obtained from the ExIm Bank. And roads also; here our work is mainly during the dry season. One can hardly construct roads during the rainy season. So in October and November, we begin construction of roads. This is also the same with rural electrification. I have the Ministry of Rural Development; it is taking care of electrification of rural areas. We normally have a tripartite arrangement. We involve the local community, and then the state government comes in.

**EIR:** During the crisis of 1993, could you tell us what you found when you came in as governor here in this state?

**Bako:** Obviously, I did not just wake up one day and say: Come to Akwa Ibom state. I was stationed in Lagos before my appointment here. The crisis was building up and we were all disgusted with what was happening and were praying for a solution to the political crisis that was not created by the present military people. I can say for myself: We are politically democratic officers, if you put it that way, those who believe in democracy. Maybe that is why we were able to come in and just put in place a democratic structure that will lead Nigeria forward. And when I got here, I had many problems, because the then-civilian governor had to agree to

the dismantling of the weak structure that existed, because it was not leading the country anywhere. I didn't want any sort of crisis in Akwa Ibom state, and I made them realize that the crisis was not made by the people of Akwa Ibom state, and so we cannot [be held responsible for] a crisis that we did not do. Throughout this period, Akwa Ibom state has been a very peaceful state.

**EIR:** Could you take the areas of health and education, and tell us concretely what type of progress has been made in the ten months of your governorship?

**Bako:** When we came in, the teachers' salaries were not being paid; the teachers were owed. We were able to pay the arrears, and made sure that the teachers went back into the schools. So, right now we do not owe any teacher. Some of the schools have a plan of upgrading the schools to provide a more constructive education for the people of Akwa Ibom state. This we are vigorously pursuing, that at the end of the day we will have enough students from Akwa Ibom state to fill its quota in all the universities; we are working seriously on that. The university we have here is run by the federal government.

With respect to health, we have a plan that within the next two years or so, each local government should have a general hospital. We have continued the construction of four general hospitals in four local government areas. Once these four hospitals are completed, then we will have such a situation. I visited the site of construction of a specialist hospital. Because of the location of Akwa Ibom state, the nearest place is Calabar, and it takes over an hour to drive there. When somebody really needs this hospital, he has to drive an hour. So I decided to pick up the construction of a specialist hospital, and by the grace of God, I think in December we will get it commissioned. It may be seen as progress, but I'm looking at this as a *necessity* for this state government.

**EIR:** The four hospitals you are talking about; for how long had they been on the drawing board, and for how long had they been stalled and for what reason?

**Bako:** They had been on the drawing board during the previous administration, and we want to get them completed this year. I'm not sure why they didn't move ahead with these hospitals; perhaps due to lack of money, due to political reasons. I'm not a politician. All I wanted was to complete the hospitals. It is just like this specialist hospital. It was abandoned. The administrative block was started three years ago, and was abandoned. When I came in, we went back to the drawing board, expanded it, and took it up. In the next two months, we will get it completed.

**EIR:** Do you have any problems motivating doctors, or teachers, either coming to the state or remaining in the state and working?

**Bako:** For teachers, I have no problem because the major problem was paying their salaries. Now they get their salaries; actually, we have given them an increase—not only teachers but all the civil servants. We started this this month. For doctors, I think they are excited; not only those in Akwa Ibom state, but also doctors of Akwa Ibom origin that are outside. They are now excited when they see the specialist hospital. They say things like, "Let this hospital be completed; we want to come home and contribute our own quarter." So the problem is not now with motivation. They are even eager to come home, and show their expertise in this area.

**EIR:** But can all the families today afford the health care? For example, somebody told us, "It's good and fine, but if you go to a clinic or to a doctor, he prescribes medicine; then you have to go buy it; many people don't have the money any more. This was different 15 years ago." What's the situation today?

**Bako:** Yes; when I came in I had this problem and we embarked on provisional free drugs—not just subsidized drugs, but free drugs. I want to do this from time to time, inasmuch as I have the financial resources to do so. But from time to time, we will purchase drugs and distribute them free of charge to all the general hospitals and clinics, to make sure that those who actually need drugs will get

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them. What we are doing is supplementary, since we cannot do it all the time.

**EIR:** As far as equipment is concerned for these hospitals, do you have to import it, or is there Nigerian-manufactured equipment? Is it difficult with the low naira [national currency] to buy equipment?

**Bako:** Especially because we are going to import oil, we decided to solicit assistance, so this is social services to the people. We wrote to the oil companies—like Mobil, Shell—to help us and donate some of this equipment. And another group in the United States decided to send a dialysis unit to us. Most of the equipment for the specialist hospital, since we cannot fund it alone, and since oil will be imported, we tend to solicit for assistance from organizations and corporate bodies.

**EIR:** Is that sufficient for your needs?

**Bako:** We want to get whatever we can get; then we will look at how to supplement this. To equip this specialist hospital is going to be very expensive; we may not be able to carry it out alone.

**EIR:** Do you have cases where doctors are coming back from overseas after their training; or is most of the training of the doctors done in Nigeria, and then they remain here?

**Bako:** Yes, we have doctors whom we send overseas for specialist training, and who come back. This is a big reason why we should have this specialist hospital. Because right now most of the hospitals we have are general hospitals. When we train the specialist doctors, they don't have the means to practice in full what they trained for overseas.

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**EIR:** Earlier you mentioned an ExIm Bank loan to the government of Akwa Ibom. We are a bit critical about foreign loans—their terms, their repayment, conditionalities, and so forth. I believe that loan was taken before you became the military administrator. Firstly, I'd like you to give your own view, based on a review of those terms of such extended loans, and implications to the future of the Akwa Ibom treasury or purse. Secondly, when you came into office, did you review those terms, with a cost-benefit analysis? What would you advise other state governments to be careful with, or what to be aware of, or what are the benefits, and so on?

**Bako:** My personal view about loans, if I have my way, from my experience, is that you don't take foreign loans. If I had my way, I wouldn't. With respect to this ExIm Bank loan, we are reviewing the terms from the cost analysis standpoint. When the report is submitted, we will determine if we will go on with stage two of the loan. But from my own view, definitely, I cannot encourage any foreign loan, because if you find out the technicalities, half of that loan

goes on salaries, so you are not benefitting from the loan; this is my personal experience.

**EIR:** Half of the loan goes for salaries for whom?

**Bako:** When you sign the loan, you have to pay the technical partner that will come to execute that project in foreign currency, and they have to come from abroad. We have so many financed projects in Akwa Ibom state. Half of the money so far released, has gone for salaries alone.

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## Interview: Gregory Agbonemi

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# In a nutshell, our problem is economic

*Group Captain Gregory Agbonemi is the military administrator of Nigeria's Cross River state. He was interviewed by Uwe Friesecke and Lawrence Freeman during a visit to Nigeria in October 1994.*

*The National Constitutional Conference to which Captain Agbonemi refers, as EIR reported in our June 16, 1995 issue, has now concluded and has presented its report to the government of head of state Gen. Sani Abacha.*

**EIR:** Since becoming the military administrator of Cross River state, can you tell us something about the situation that you found here, and the programs you've initiated?

**Agbonemi:** Since my arrival here, the first thing that drew my attention was the sanitation in the urban area. I must admit that I was not too impressed. I went around and discovered that the inhabitants were actually doing their best, toiling, hiring beggars here and there to clean up the town, cleaning gutters, involving children, women. I discovered that they were trying to do everything on their own; there was no outside assistance. Compared with some of the other states that I've seen, the kind of assistance that comes from World Bank development, the idea of infrastructural development that is normally given by the World Bank to assist states, had not been understood or assimilated by this state. I was surprised to see that people had to gather their meager resources to contribute to the hiring of payloaders to clear their fields, and so on.

So it is my intention, first of all, to attempt to get World Bank support for the capital city, and then later for other towns within the state. In that regard, I would like them to assist in terms of equipment, payloaders, special dust bins, to