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18 Nov - 1 Dec 2016

Issue No 087

FORTNIGHTLY

To Inspire, Inform and Entertain

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SUPER MAN

The Nigerian who has helped launch 1000s of UK businesses

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MAGNIFICENT MASTERCLASS BODES WELL FOR NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

When we seek to help Nigeria we in the diaspora have a tendency to think big. Maybe that is our downfall. That was the clear message when the dynamic Nigerian School Sports and Family Funday (now known as NSF) organisation celebrated its 5th anniversary on the terrace of the House of Commons on November 4, with man of the moment Tom Ilube as keynote speaker.

The NSF is one of the most constructive diaspora groups, having raised many thousands of pounds since 2012 to develop schools and education in Nigeria - stimulating small 'African' businesses in the UK along the way.

The 32 member organisations - old boys' and girls' associations - have funded everything from toilet blocks, to classrooms, computer blocks and libraries among many other things, to give the next generation a realistic chance of fulfilling their potential.

Five of those old school organisations - Almadyya College, Eko Boys High School, Lagos Anglican Girls Grammar School, Reagan Memorial Baptist Girls School and Government College Ikorodu - were singled out as examples of best practice this year for their wide-ranging and far-reaching initiatives back home.

Under the stewardship of the chair Bimbola Babarinde and general co-ordinator Cornelius Sanwo the NSF has gone from one



Above: NSF members. Right: Tom Ilube



Pictures & Cover Picture Eugene Kaitel

triumph to another - staging among many other things a celebrated annual sports day and regular seminars on education. The latter underpins how the organisation seeks to look forward and develop, seeking the best possible advice.

Tom Ilube provided that at the anniversary. The founder of the Hammersmith Academy, the National College for Digital Skills in Tottenham, London, and the African Science Academy for Girls in Ghana, Mr Ilube was recently named the most influential black man in Britain in the annual Power List.

Introduced as such, the 'boy from Benin', who has also scaled the heights of the City of London and is a hugely successful dot.com entrepreneur, looked abashed.

He revealed that when he informed his wife of the honour she kissed her teeth and said, "You? You're not even the most powerful black man in this house!" His friends back home responded, "You? From Afuze. You a witch. It's not possible."

There was one final humorous nod to his roots. Arriving at the House of Commons he found the gate locked and was told to walk all the way round the palace to another entrance.

"I looked at the man and said, 'Do you know which school I went to? I didn't go to one of these posh Lagos schools, I went to Edo college, Benin, and I will fly this fence and you won't even see me.' It was only because I was with my wife that I did not."

But then it was down to the serious business. What the NSF membership wanted to know was how to embed change, how to create sustainable schools in Nigeria going forward.

"One of the things you learn about education here in London, is that when people set up schools they build them with the mindset that that school is going to exist for the next 500 years," he said. He cited examples such as Merchant Taylors, established 1561, St Paul's, established 1509. "There's something we can learn from that. It doesn't just happen. You have to think about it, plan for it, you have to put in place the structures, the governance, that means that this school is going to exist for literally hundreds of years."

He described his own journey. It took Mr Ilube about seven years to take the idea for the Hammersmith Academy from a blank sheet of paper to its doors opening in 2011. It now has

800 pupils. With ASA, which opened this year, he revealed, "from the start I thought where do I want this school to be in 25 years time, that's where we started to build from. You have to have that sort of vision. You then have to think about teamwork; the absolute key thing when doing anything like that is teamwork."

He continued, "One of the things we suffer from a little bit in Nigeria is the individual hero who wants to do it himself, you know, it's all about me. I never do that. It's all about let's get together a team that shares this vision and we make it happen together. And that's something we need to do here if we want to achieve that vision."

Drilling down into how to build in sustainability Mr Ilube talked about the livery clubs in the City of London, which have existed for over a thousand years.

"Governance is the thing that makes them sustainable, and the one thing that they build into their governance is that nobody ever has more than one thousand years."

"I think there's something there about the way we have to run our institutions in Nigeria, that people going into them know that they're just caretakers for a short period, they're not becoming owners, and I think we need to see that shift to build in sustainability."

Asked what would be the single most important thing that could improve Nigeria's schools he gave an answer that he said was equally as relevant to UK schools.

"One of the challenges is with the quality of the teachers and investment in teaching as a profession, and I wonder if there's investment in teaching as a profession in Nigeria at the level there needs to be and in particular in headship."

He explained, "My experience as a governor and chair is that schools with the same resources will be an outstanding school if the head is great and in special measures if he isn't. There's a huge problem here in the UK with headship and I suspect that problem is multiplied in Nigeria."

"I suspect we're always happy when there's money available to put the money into bricks and mortar because there's a brand new school and the minister or governor can come and open it. We're less likely to put the money into leadership training and salaries at that level. So I would look into that area."

Fired up by Mr Ilube's compelling insight the NSF membership embraced his blueprint as the key to a brilliant future. It was a magnificent masterclass.

FACTS 2012-2016

EVENTS 2012-2016

8 CONNECTING Nigerians
PROMOTING Awareness
DEVELOPING Communities

PEOPLE

32 Members

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"
Aristotle

FUNDS RAISED- mainly for small businesses

£60,000 2012 to 2016

CHARITIES/ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED

AGLT, AFRUCA, AMAUDO UK, BNET, GSM UK, HEAL-D, HOPE FOR SICKLE CELL, PENSIONS ADVISORY SERVICE, RARE, SICKLE CELL SOCIETY, TOBI ADEYEMI, TOTAL PARENTAL GUIDANCE ORPHANAGE, WATER AID, WORLD CHILD CANCER, YACNACY.

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"We suffer a little bit in Nigeria from the individual hero"

NSF OLD BOYS' AND GIRLS' MEMBERSHIP ASSOCIATIONS

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 GOVERNMENT COLLEGE KETU	 GOVERNMENT COLLEGE LAGOS	 HOLY CHILD COLLEGE, LAGOS	 IGBOBI COLLEGE, YABA
 LAGOS AFRICAN CHURCH GRAMMAR SCHOOL	 L.A.G.G.S	 LAGOS ANGLICAN GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL	 L.N.C.C.
 LOYOLA COLLEGE IBADAN	 METHODIST GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL YABA	 NIGERIAN MILITARY SCHOOL ZARIA	 OKE-ONA GRAMMAR SCHOOL, ABEOKUTA
 OLIVET BAPTIST HIGH SCHOOL, OYO	 OUR LADY OF APOSTLES, YABA	 QUEENS COLLEGE, LAGOS	 REAGAN MEMORIAL BAPTIST GIRLS SECONDARY SCHOOL, LAGOS
 RUSSIAN COLLEGES	 ST ANNE'S SCHOOL, IBADAN	 ST FINBARR'S COLLEGE, AKOKA	 ST GREGORY'S COLLEGE, LAGOS