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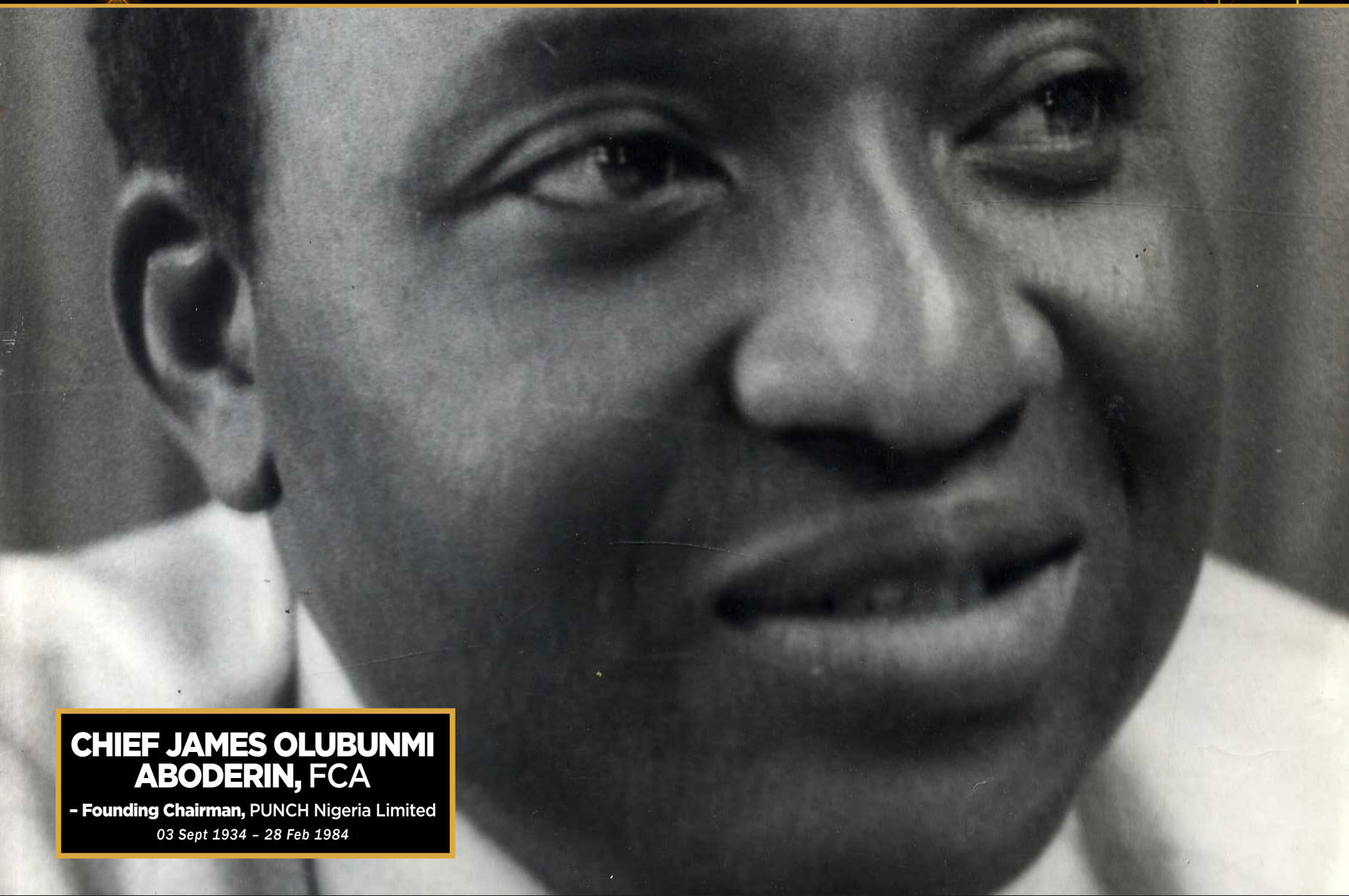
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PUNCH 50TH ANNIVERSARY

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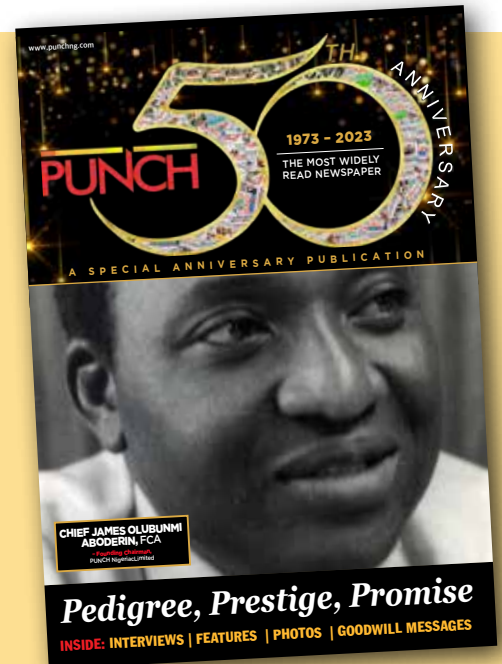
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THE TEAM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Adeyeye Joseph

EDITORS
Ademola Oni
Adedayo Oketola
Olusola Fabiyi

CONTRIBUTORS
Niyi Odebode, Akinpelu Dada, Adelani Adepegba
Oluwafemi Juwe, Tofarati Ige, Samuel Bolaji, Gbenga
Oloniran, Janet Ogundepo, Dare Olawin, Victoria
Edeme, Adekunle Sulaiman, George Allaputa

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Agboola Bakare, Lekan Ayodele, Wahab Akintunde,
Gbenga Ashaye

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Our politics must work for the next generation – Obaseki

... *Nigeria must encourage competition among States to have a fighting chance at survival*

The Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, in this interview, situates his strategic vision as a politician who is future-focused. From reforms in education, public service, agriculture, economy, he notes that he is not in politics for short-term benefits but to set the foundation for the rebirth of Edo State and to place it on good footing as a leading sub-national on the continent. Excerpts:

In the last six years, Edo has recorded unprecedented progress. In terms of education, resetting infrastructure for growth and human capital development, what would you say has been the most difficult decision you have taken so far?

I think almost all the decisions we have had to take have been very difficult because it's like we're trying to get a trailer, a heavy-duty truck to accelerate its pace of movement to be able to meander through difficult terrains. Every decision we have taken has been difficult because some of them were not understood when we took the decisions earlier and there was natural resistance or scepticism about why we took those decisions. But let's just look at a few. First was the issue of education and the need to retrain the teachers. If you recall, before my time, my predecessor actually attempted to deal with this issue but there was a huge backlash. You will remember the humiliating experience of a teacher not being able to read. So, for us, any attempt to try and start reform in that space was being suspected, and dealing with the unions was a problem. I believe we were able to overcome that challenge because we were able to build trust very early and trust in the sense that whatever we committed to, we came through. How did we deal with the issue of teachers when we adopted the EDOBEST model? When we said we needed to retrain teachers, we told them that the first batch of teachers we wanted to train was voluntary, it was optional and there was no compulsion. It was after the very successful outcome of the training for the first set of 2000 teachers that the others began to see that there was something very positive for them; that now made it possible for us to get the buy-in from the other teachers. Like I said, every decision has been very difficult. In terms of governance, you've got to make choices: Do I put more money into building human capacity or infrastructure? If so, what type of infrastructure and who are those to benefit? There will be winners and losers in every policy decision you make and those who lose are not going to keep quiet; they are going to make trouble.

So, for us, on the scale, I think every decision has been difficult but one common thing is our ability to show commitment, earn the trust of our people, and this trust is built on our ability to show accountability. You know you can say anything about the Godwin Obaseki-led administration but nobody has ever accused us of stealing money; nobody has ever said we gave contracts that were inflated and took the money. In fact, on the other hand, people are always asking, 'where and how are you getting the money to undertake these projects?'

In seven and half years, all the reforms you started are getting to a point of convergence. Are you satisfied with the results you are seeing?

I am happy; I won't say I am satisfied. I am happy that things are finally beginning to make sense, but we are not where we should be. What we have done in six and a half years is to show that it is possible to reform and undertake meaningful transformation and gain the buy-in of the people. Reform and transformation take time and we are in the middle of most of the reforms of Edo State now. Take education, for instance. We started the EdoBEST transformation programme in 2017 and in five years, the children we started with are just in primary 5, but the foundation has been laid. We won't have time to see them through junior and senior secondary schools and all the other things they need to do. We are glad and I am happy. That is why I say I am happy that we've been able to lay the foundation. I am not satisfied because we are not there yet. It's when we get there, when we begin to see these children go through universities, get world-class jobs, that I can be satisfied.

Yes, but can you tell me with confidence that those children show a significant difference than it was previously, before the reforms?

Definitely! In fact, there are very objective criteria to evaluate learning outcomes and these are standard criteria. By the time a child has received instructions after a certain period, for instance, a child of 8 years who is in primary 2 or 3 must be able to read a certain number of words per minute without any assistance and these are standards. And for us in Edo, our children are doing better, almost 75% more than the Nigerian average and when you benchmark them to global standards, they are slightly under what their peers are doing in Asia and Europe.

Coincidentally, this education sector is where you are getting the most accolades and comments from both within and outside the country.

What is the one thing about the reform so far that gives you that joy, to say 'I got it right'? Or has it gotten to that point where you can say 'I actually got this right?'

I think we have made significant progress but I can't say we have gotten it right completely yet. It is still in progress. What I can say is that one is impressed when you listen to these children. The way they speak – their diction, rationality and sense of logic, it gives you joy. I will tell you a story I have told so many times before. Two terms after we introduced EDOBEST, a parent came back to say, governor I am so glad about what you are doing in education. He said he has two children – two sons. One is 6 years old and the other 10 years old. The 6-year-old is in primary 1 and the



• Obaseki

10-year-old is in primary 4. The one who is 6 years old who is now immersed in the EdoBEST reform comes back from school, does his homework, and is excited. He loves getting ready for school the next day. The one who is 10 years old comes back from school and goes out to play ball. The one who is 6 years old wakes up early and wants to go to school because he wants his name to be on the Character Board and enjoys the other exciting things integrated into the EdoBEST programme. The parent said he could see the progress in the 6-year-old but can't see the same in the 10-year-old because the younger one is reading better than the elder brother. So, he asked, governor, what should I do? Can I bring the 10-year-old to come and join the brother in one of your schools? So, we had to come up with teaching at the right level. This was to help those who were in higher classes whose classes did not kick-off with the EdoBEST programme to adjust. Back to your question, it gives me a lot of joy to see the result when you benchmark the performance and outcome of these children with their peers. I am personally confident that if we continue at this rate, we will not have another generation of a large number of school dropouts.

Your tenure will end in the next one year and a few months. How do you ensure that the person who will take over from you shares this same passion, vision, purpose and commitment to take it to the next level? That should be a challenge for you.

Yes, you see, at the end of the day, it's about building institutions so that it doesn't matter too much who comes. You know that certain things must happen. For us, we are optimistic that if we continue at this rate and deepen reforms to a certain level, no matter how bad the person who takes over is, the system will endure. For example, we believe that with what we have done today, in the next six or seven years, the teachers in our schools know that at a certain time in the month, they get their salary. They know that there is a system that checks on the time they clock in, that there is a quality assurance team that goes round and checks them, that there is technology and you can't run the school system without that technology that we have put in place. We hired a fresh batch of 5000 teachers who do not know another way of teaching except the EdoBEST way. So, even if we have someone who does not believe in our reforms, there is a huge audience of almost 300,000 children in the system. Just imagine their parents, then over 16,000 teachers, who are there, watching. You don't want to hurt these people. If you are going to stay on top politically, you won't ignore them.

Digital transformation is another part of the accolades you get. Edo is now seen as a technologically advanced State because the governor is trying to digitalize everything, including the C-of-O acquisition processes. How challenging has it been?

I think this has been one of our greatest challenges because you know the thing with technology and digitalization; it is a culture change, getting people to do things differently from how they are used to do it. First, technology and digitalization bring a certain level of transparency and openness and therefore accountability sets in. This was not the norm in the system before we came in. There was natural resistance. The average age of civil servants when we came in was 47 years. Meanwhile, the mean age of the population of the State when we came in was about 19 years old. You can see the difference between the people running the civil service and the public. At 47 years, it takes a bit of pain to adopt the use of technology. So, that was a real challenge and it continues to be a challenge. How have we been able to overcome it? We overcame it because fortunately for us, we saw that the civil service had not been adequately staffed. We found out that there were huge vacancies in the service. So, we have been able to bring in an army of young people who understand the culture of technology. With that, we have been able to adapt to the digitalized system rapidly and we have moved so far. In the last few years, we have digitalized our archives, almost 9 million records. So, it's there. We built our own data centre in Government House. We have made all the major investments including the fibre optic connections that cuts across the entire State.

Talking about data, data is important for planning and Nigeria is known for not having proper data for different aspects of the economy. We have you at the state level really pushing this and becoming a success story.

What do you say to your fellow governors and even the federal government to put emphasis on data because you can't plan without it?

I think it all happens for two reasons: the whole world is moving digital. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the future, right? So, even if you are not deliberately or unwittingly collecting data, data is being obtained. By just holding your Android phone, we can just get data about your movement and all. By doing just that, your data is being gathered. The issue here is maybe we have not seen a successful model within our clime. So, what we have tried to do in Edo is real and it will then serve as an impetus to say if Edo has been able to do it, then why not any other State. Then they will begin to make meaningful efforts. It's not about money. It is not about funding. It is about commitment. That commitment comes from the part of you seeing the benefits. We believe that with these kinds of reforms at the national level, things will change. Now that they are removing subsidies and those measures that never created or allowed competition, many States today will now see that they have no option but to do things properly so that they can attract real private sector money.

Tell me why you are undertaking such an ambitious palm oil development project when there seems to be a movement away from everything oil related. I know palm oil is different from crude oil and gas. Tell me why the special interest in this particular oil.

If you think about this, palm oil is really indigenous to us here. We have seen people come here, collaborate with us, take materials from us and take it back to their country and see how they have used it to transform their economies. Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. Today, you know what Indonesia earns from oil palm. Don't forget that oil palm is the most prolific edible fat in the world. You get more yield than groundnuts and others. For us, that's the reason why we've been very keen on using oil palm as an agricultural product to attract huge investments. It will be difficult finding somebody that will give us half a billion dollars for cassava. But with oil palm, because of its very nature, it is easy to get investments. These investments are not only in terms of mechanisation, but skills – agronomic skills and other skills for proper farming practices. These are needed to help you develop your agricultural industry. The reason we have been very aggressive is that if we are able to bring in investment for oil palm, then we have brought in the business and investment to develop the entire agricultural sector. It's very strategic and deliberate and this is going to impact the economy greatly. You know, we have given out up to 70,000 hectares of new lands in addition to what has been cultivated by the two major companies already investing in oil palm in Edo. Assuming for each hectare, you need 50 people to cultivate it, at 70,000 hectares, you already have how many jobs?

I'm not seeing a man who is in a hurry to take credit or planning for the short term. You are looking at the long-term. Is that what I'm seeing here today?

Yes, that is it. It has to be about the future. Why we are in politics is to create wealth and opportunities for the future, not for ourselves. If people like Awolowo, Enahoro and the rest acted only in self-interest, we would not have gotten the advantage that brought us to where we picked up from. You could say I am a politician who works for the next generation.

There appears to be a lot of interest in establishing processing companies in the State as we have seen with the ethanol and gas refinery plants. What does this mean for you?

Yet again, we are very fortunate in Edo State. Our land, apart from being strategically located, is also diverse. We have almost everything. We have good vegetation that sustains a wide variety of crops which serve as raw materials. We have some of the largest onshore reserves for gas which is an energy source. Outside of Kaduna and Zamfara, we have the largest number of mining licences. We already have the basics for industrialization. We have agriculture and raw materials for industries; we have energy from gas and we have mineral resources. So, all we need to do is train our human capacity, which is the reason for the emphasis on education. We cannot continue to buy things from around the world, that's our dilemma today. So, for us in Edo, we see ourselves as the industrial hub. It's a very deliberate strategy. We want to build our own industrialization based on our natural resources.

Tell us about the Benin Port Project? Recently you announced you are now prepared for the port?

We have an empire that thrived for over five centuries ago. What is the reason? We believe it was the ability to trade with the rest of the world. So, the Benin Empire has always been global and that opportunity to trade is because of our access to the Atlantic Ocean through the Benin River. That river is still there today. From the Atlantic, the Apapa is about 15 nautical miles. So, with the necessary investments, we will become another option. The Benin Port is the closest path to the belly of Nigeria. If you can move your containers to Benin, you are less than two hours from the main market in the East; you can get to Kogi in another 2 to 3 hours and through Ondo, you can access the South West. It will relieve the pressure. We went through a very open process to see whether it's viable and whether it makes economic sense. That is why it took us two years to do the study for all things we need to do and open it up to investors to come and pitch. We had three major investors and from there, one emerged. We are close. We hope and believe that all things being equal, they should start construction shortly.

What about primary healthcare; how much have you done in this area?

For us, the emphasis has been on primary healthcare. Part of our whole healthcare strategy is hinged on four key factors. The first is healthcare financing. Somebody must pay, unlike in the past where everybody relied on government expenditure which just didn't help our healthcare system. Most people now pay out of pocket. So, without the healthcare financing system, it will be difficult to sustain any healthcare system. What we have done is to launch the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme. We asked ourselves, with the government's limited finances, where should the government spend its money? Is it in secondary care or primary care? We chose primary care. Then how should we approach primary care? We decided to approach primary care from two perspectives: primary care at the time had just buildings. We said no, it's human capacity more than anything else that drives the healthcare system.

Most of the primary healthcare workers we met were residents in the local governments, and because the local government structure was very weak and couldn't support an efficient primary healthcare centre, it didn't work. We had to set up a separate agency – the Primary Healthcare Development Agency. We moved the primary healthcare workers into that agency which we now share with the local governments. With that, we have control of them. We now changed their conditions of service and scheme of service to create more incentives for them to do the work and ensured adequate capacity building. Lastly, we adopted technology. If you go into any primary healthcare centre, we know you have come there because the healthcare workers take your vitals, record them and the doctor can see from the backend the condition of that patient and then follows up. Our goal is to have 200 of these primary health care centres across the State with one in every ward.

You spoke yesterday that without emphasis on exports we are not going anywhere in this country. That we will still face the crisis that we are facing. Do you think the people at the federal level are listening? Do they really appreciate and recognize how

WHY WE ARE IN POLITICS IS TO CREATE WEALTH AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE, NOT FOR OURSELVES. IF PEOPLE LIKE AWOLOWO, ENAHORO AND THE REST ACTED ONLY IN SELF-INTEREST, WE WOULD NOT HAVE GOTTEN THE ADVANTAGE THAT BROUGHT US TO WHERE WE PICKED UP FROM

important it is to get out of this crisis especially now that forex is a big challenge in the country?

I will not say we don't realise it. I will say that it's a structural problem with our economy. Sometimes, it's quite difficult to change the structure underlying the fundamentals. What has happened over the last 4 to 5 decades is because we found crude oil and hydrocarbons to quickly sell and make money and get foreign exchange. It has not really encouraged us to do exports unlike the situation before we found oil. Also, the culture of building competitive goods is lacking. For you to export, you have to do something competitive, your price has to be better than the other person's price. Why would someone come and buy things from you if he can get them cheaper somewhere else? We need to now look at the entire chain and the process of production, what do we have an advantage in, outside our crude oil? Once upon a time, we had an advantage in cash crops like cocoa, oil palm, rubber, and today, we have advantage in energy and gas. The gas can be converted into energy and that's what we want in Edo, to generate electricity that is less than 50 % of the cost in Europe. So, today, one-kilowatt hour of power in Europe will cost you as much as 30 cents per kwh. In Edo today, I want to be able to generate not more than 11 cents per kwh. So, from an energy perspective, I already have an advantage.

If I can have the same quality of manpower and all the other inputs, I should be able to produce competitively and then export.

There is a problem of running a government and generating income to do infrastructure. What should Nigeria do? What do the leaders in Abuja need to do to restructure and redirect Nigeria to make Nigeria profitable?

We have to look at the structure of the country. The design today is too huge to be efficient. Right, we need to first get the federal government to reduce its size significantly and just focus on those things that we can't do for ourselves. The few policy things that will help us bring the country together, you don't need 52% of the revenues coming in to do that. We need to significantly reduce the size of the federal government. It is too wasteful. Then, we need to allow competition among the sub-nationals so that you don't have one point of failure. It's better to have 36 points of failure and you know all of it will not fail. But today, once the centre fails, we all fail. So, the structure needs to change. We need to introduce competition. That is the way people can breathe and the country can breathe. Right now, the country is choked. If the federal government does not build its roads, I cannot move goods and services across the States and can't move my goods from Edo to Kogi, my neighbouring State. This is because what connects us is the federal road. You should fix your federal roads or have a collaboration

between us, the States so that your roads across my State are a collaboration between us and I don't have to wait for somebody in Abuja before I can repair it, whether it's road or any other infrastructure. For example, in Edo, digital infrastructure is not federally-controlled so I connected all my fibre across Edo State. So, if my neighbour is interested too, I just connect them. We don't need anybody in Abuja to now begin to regulate us. So, what we need to do is to ensure that first, we let the centre reduce what it controls and do the things it is supposed to do very effectively and efficiently. What are the key issues? You need security and safety for people to encourage investments. One reason why we have been able to encourage and attract the number of investments to Edo is because of the perception of security here. There is nothing wrong with policing at the federal, state level and local government levels. Nigeria is not going to break up. So, we shouldn't have this attitude that you want to hold everything together, no, Nigeria is maturing. What we need is to change the structure and introduce this element of competitiveness. You will see different parts of the country thriving and then there will be more cooperation- interstate or inter-regional cooperation.

So, in other words, you are advocating devolution of power across the State

We cannot rule this country without restructuring power as is seen today.

Some people have also accused the state government of choking the local governments?

What we are saying is let there be 36 points of competition, not everybody would choke their LGAs. If you see that releasing or breathing fresh air to your local government helps your growth, maybe that's the model you would like to adopt.

Let us talk about the airport project; what is happening to it?

We have made quite some progress. We have acquired the property, the land. We are finalising all the surveys and the studies. Experts are looking at all the things we need to do, all the technical things we need to make the airport safe. We are also talking to potential partners. We are not an aviation company so we don't know how to build an airport. We need partners and we have one or two people who have indicated interest in partnering with the State. For us, just like the Benin Port, we have established viability from the initial economic studies on the route between Benin and Abuja and if we are able to build an airport in between, it will make a lot of sense. It's an area with over 10 to 12 million population.

The Museum of West African Art is taking shape. How will it impact the local art scene and how will it change the narrative of Benin bronzes?

One unique advantage of Edo is its culture. Nobody else has it and the world recognises this. It has become even a lot more famous with all the controversies surrounding the return of the Benin artefacts. So, if the world has acknowledged and recognised these unique attributes, how do we as a State and as a people monetize it? How do we take advantage of it? How do we give it some touristic value? If people travel across the globe to see these things, how can we tell our story differently so that more people can come here to see them? These artefacts, our forebears created long ago. Those same creative instincts that led to all of these are still here with us. It is still the same blood that flows in our veins. So, what we're doing is creating a similar environment that will support those creative instincts, the creative genius in our people to blossom. You can only do that when you have the supporting infrastructure to do these things. That's where things like the pavilion we're constructing, the museum and the display areas become important and necessary. So, it's not just about the return of the bronzes. The other issue is preserving them. How are we conserving them? If the work that we are asking to be returned were not preserved, will we find them today to be returned? For us, we see art as a fortune so we're trying to create the environment including the infrastructure so as to create wealth. That is why the Museum of West African Arts (MOWAA) is important; that is why the pavilion is important, that is why we redesigned the city centre as a cultural centre where people can come in and see elements of this great kingdom. We are restoring parts of the moats so that people can come and see these moats and understand how they influenced our culture.

Your tenure is almost over, less than one year. It started with a dream and you have been able to achieve some of what you set out to achieve. Tell me in a nutshell, how has this journey been?

It's been interesting but unfortunately, people remember more of the fight and ask why the fights. I mean, if we didn't have them, we would not have been able to come this far. There were compromises that we just couldn't make which led to the fights but people are emphasizing the fight, but don't see the benefit of the fight. I believe that my successors will not have it as difficult as we had because we tried the new paradigm and people can see the benefit in this new way of thinking and doing things. Well, if you ask me if I would go the same path if I have to do it all over again, I will say yes because I don't see how else I could have done it. It's like asking me if you want to eat Omelette again, are you going to break some eggs?



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Not affiliated to any political party, we feature a range of views, breadth and diversity of opinion on our comment pages. Our peerless editorials meet the test of excellence, clarity, style, moral purpose, sound reasoning, and the power to influence public opinion. We seek to balance our news at all times and report all shades of opinion. And that has always been one of our distinguishing strengths.

Editorial Integrity

In our efforts to uphold the highest of ethical standards and a commitment to the uncorrupted pursuit of truth, based on verifiable facts and knowledge, The PUNCH has a Code of Ethics for its journalists that it strictly enforces. The Code and the channels for ethical complaints are published daily on page two and the back page of the newspaper respectively. We know that the public rightly expects the highest ethical standards from The PUNCH, its staff and its titles. Whichever the title, whatever the story or news and whoever the writer is, the hallmark of our editorial content is the adherence to the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality. With courage and rigour, we strive to establish the truth in all circumstances and guard against groundless speculation.

Punch Interest

PUNCH serves the interest of the Nigerian public at all times. The newspaper has undertaken several noble crusades in accordance with its belief to promote such causes. As a newspaper, PUNCH has suffered under a severe operating environment, especially during the military era, but it has continued to defy the odds.

Facilities

At inception, the company used the Crabtree Printing Machine. In the 1980s, it moved on to the Rondoset Printing Machine,

which was acquired from the defunct East Germany. It also stepped up the business by installing the Goss Community Press in November 1998. All this contributed to the image of The PUNCH and the general aesthetics of the newspaper itself.

But the ultra-modern Goss Universal 75 from Nantes, France, in 2008. The aesthetics and printing quality of The PUNCH titles now compare favourably with those of any other in the world.

To complement the Goss 75, which can print 64 pages all colour at once and is described as the first in Africa, outside of South Africa is a modern pre-press operation. The pre-press outfit enhances and speeds up the quality of the final output. The company has also been expanding its printing operations outside of its headquarters in order to stay ahead of competition and address the issue of printing more than one edition for an increasingly sophisticated and diverse market.

Market Share

As a brand, *The PUNCH* is Nigeria's best-selling newspaper. For decades, it has been so. The profile of the newspaper has soared because of its editorial integrity and production aesthetics, which are unrivalled. *The PUNCH* titles are enjoyed by diverse segments of the society, in different parts of the country and across the West African sub-region.

Choice of Advertisers

PUNCH is an important vehicle to reach an audience that is highly desirable to advertisers. PUNCH, as an advertising medium, delivers your message to your target most effectively as readers are highly engaged with the newspaper in print, online, smartphones and tablets. As strong brands, the PUNCH titles give advertisers the ultimate value for their money as they reach their targets with ease. Your adverts are in the right place when they are published in The PUNCH. Our impact is, indeed, very real!

Awards

The PUNCH is synonymous with awards. It beat all the other newspapers in Nigeria to the Newspaper of the Year at the Nigerian Media Merit Awards and the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence in 2015, where it also picked the two awards on editorial writing. On another level, PUNCH reporters regularly win awards at the national, continental and global levels, including the CNN MultiChoice African Journalists Awards.



Reliable energy, limitless potential

Nigeria's journey is our journey. From inception, we have been striving to build a sustainable business anchored on vital strategic priorities. Seplat Energy's new business direction reinvigorates its three key priorities:

- Driving social development
- Focusing on environmental care and reporting
- Maximizing returns for all stakeholders

We are driven by our core values of **SAFETY, INTEGRITY, PARTNERSHIP, AMBITION** and **AGILITY** to build a broader energy business for a cleaner and sustainable energy supply for Nigeria.

Seplatenergy.com

Witnessing PUNCH's freshness, transformative journalism, fill me with pride

– Chairman, **Angela Emuwa**

SPECIAL INTERVIEW



• Emuwa

Mrs. Angela Emuwa is the Chairman of PUNCH Nigeria Limited. Emuwa, an accomplished businesswoman, leads PUNCH's forward-looking and highly successful board at a time when newspapers are facing an existensial crisis. In this interview with JUWE OLUWAFEMI, to celebrate PUNCH's 50th anniversary, she speaks on the challenges associated with leading a thriving family business, adjusting to boardroom politics and the growth adaptation of the company

Since June 26, 2018, when you took over as the Chairman of the 'Most Widely Read Newspaper' in the country, what has your experience been?

Since assuming the role of chair, I've encountered some challenges, but I thrive on them. Leading a family business that's inherently risk-averse, I've worked with the board to balance our traditional methods with a willingness to innovate and explore new avenues for success. Despite the fact that it took some members of the board some time to adjust to having a woman in the chair position, I remained steadfast in prioritising the company's best interests throughout every challenge. Now, as things have stabilised, I'm pleased with our current direction and eager to continue our journey of growth and adaptation.

Your name keeps featuring on the list of some influential Nigerian female journalists. What's it about you that keeps your name in that circle?

As a matter of fact, I'm not a journalist, but I guess being the chairman of PUNCH, this is a natural assumption. I describe myself as prominent in the publishing business by virtue of my experience. I joined Newswatch magazine as an advert executive and over the nine years I spent there, I rose through the ranks to senior advert executive, Assistant advert manager and then pioneer Advert Manager of Quality magazine, a general interest magazine in the Newswatch stable. I also wrote a fitness column for Quality magazine called

'Fitness With Angie'. I left Newswatch as the Corporate Affairs Manager and moved to Africa Today magazine as the Advertising Sales Director and Head of Operations. Thereafter, I moved to News Africa magazine, where I was Head of Operations. Both magazines were London-based, and I was running the Nigerian operations.

It's PUNCH Newspapers 50th Anniversary Celebration. What's the inspiration, at a time as this when the media, the print especially is burdened by the harsh realities of today's economy?

The 50th anniversary celebration of PUNCH offers us an opportunity to honour its resilient legacy amidst the harsh economic realities facing the print media industry today. This milestone serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring reflection on the newspaper's enduring commitment to journalistic excellence and public service despite economic challenges. With shifting consumer behaviours and financial pressures, the celebration underscores the newspaper's ability to adapt and thrive, showcasing its significance as a cornerstone of informed citizenship and democratic values.

Celebrating our resilience 40 years following the passing of our founding chairman is a testament to our enduring strength. I am grateful to the board, management, and especially our dedicated employees, both past and present, for their unwavering loyalty and commitment to the values and principles upheld by PUNCH. Furthermore, I take pride in highlighting that our journey serves as a

compelling case study for the perseverance of family businesses.

Under your watch, how well would you rate the performance of the PUNCH titles in the newspaper market share?

Under my watch, we continue to dominate the industry. We have the largest share in the market both in print and online. That's not to say we are complacent, though. We continually keep tabs on innovative global trends in our industry and try to see how we can adapt or adopt to stay current. Our reporters and editors have continued to win awards and recognition.

We have been winning it for years and also sustained our winning ways under my leadership.

I would say we have done well, but I will always believe we can do better.

Where do you see the PUNCH titles in the next 10 years within the Nigerian media industry?

I see PUNCH continuing to be a dominant force within the industry. We are at the point where the next generation is about to be positioned to join the business and eventually take over, giving us fresh perspectives to publishing. Prior to joining, they must have the requisite qualifications and undergo industry specific training to be the best they can be. By continually leveraging technology, data analytics, and audience insights, the newspaper aims to enhance its relevance, reach, and revenue-generating capabilities, ensuring its continued success and relevance for the next 10 years and beyond.

How does it feel, being one of the children of the illustrious Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin?

Being one of Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin's children fills me with immense pride. My father epitomised integrity, diligently earning every penny through hard work, not depending on shortcuts or windfalls. Integrity was paramount to him, and it remains central to my values. Witnessing the launch of the newspaper, witnessing its freshness and transformative impact on journalism, fill me with profound pride as the daughter of its founder.

Do you feel threatened operating in an industry dominated by men?

Not in the least. While the dominance of men in the industry could present its challenges, I view it as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes, advocate for gender equality, and demonstrate my capabilities as a professional regardless of gender. I believe in my abilities and the value I bring to the table.

How has the Aboderin name impacted your trajectory in your professional life?

As a novice advertising executive at Newswatch magazine, having the Aboderin name associated with me initially facilitated my job. Many clients knew of him and held him in high regard, which elevated my status and bolstered my confidence during sales pitches, resulting in positive outcomes. However, as I transitioned into married life and adopted a different surname, my ability to deliver remained unchanged. Even without the influence of my family name, I continued to excel professionally, ensuring effective communication and successful new client interactions. I am truly blessed to be the daughter of Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin and Mrs. Florence Jadesola Aboderin, parents with integrity who left behind good names and enduring legacies.

From your position as leader of a very successful and long-standing brand, what advice would you give the government to enhance the performance of the print media sector?

Media houses in Nigeria are struggling to stay afloat. The cost of newsprint and other printing consumables has skyrocketed. The government can support the struggling print media industry in Nigeria through various measures, including financial assistance such as low-interest loans, tax incentives, and subsidies. In addition to this, allocating government advertising budgets to print media would ensure a steady source of revenue and promote the industry's sustainability. By implementing measures such as these, the government can play a crucial role in supporting the sustainability and growth of the print media industry in Nigeria, ensuring its continued contribution to democracy, information dissemination, and socio-economic development.

What fond memories of your late father - the founder of the PUNCH Group - do you have? Do you mind sharing some of them with us?

He had a great sense of humour, and I often stored up jokes to him whenever we were together, and he would explode with that unique belly-laugh of his! I also remember once when I told him what I thought was a funny joke and there was dead silence afterwards. Awkward. Trust me, I never told that joke again!

He worked so hard for his money which probably explained his reaction once when he gave my late brother Jaiye who was about 12 at the time, money to buy some Chinese takeaway down Edgware road and he came back with no change. Jaiye said he tipped the waiter. 'Who taught you to tip?' he asked angrily. At this point, I pretended to be occupied by something else! (Those were the good old days when N1 = £1!)

Even though he was a chartered accountant, he was drawn to the Arts. He had a group of dancers named Skylark Dancers and two record labels - Lagos International Records and Skylark records. I remember a show he co-organised at the London Hilton in Park Lane, London, where Millie Jackson was headlining and the late Christie Essien performed. There were many others. Clearly, this love for music, dance, and the entertainment scene runs in the veins of his children in varying degrees.

You're a woman with the big heart and a leading caregiver through your 'Golden Hearts Touching Lives' initiative. You're also a leader of the Autism Parents Association International. How do you get the time and energy for all these tasks?

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF PUNCH OFFERS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONOUR ITS RESILIENT LEGACY AMIDST THE HARSH ECONOMIC REALITIES FACING THE PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY TODAY



Navigating these responsibilities was facilitated by flexible working hours and a strong support network. Initially, I arranged flexible working hours to accommodate my new schedule, but after a few years, I chose to resign from my corporate role to dedicate more time to my son, who is on the autism spectrum

As a non-executive director at PUNCH, I found additional flexibility to engage more with the NGOs I co-founded: 'Golden Hearts Touching Lives' and 'Autism Parents Association'. Both organisations were mostly focused on fundraising to assist and support indigent families, mostly relying on our personal contributions. For my support network, it included dedicated facilitators who worked tirelessly with my son on weekdays, allowing me the time to prioritise self-care through my dance fitness classes, which I attend from Monday to Saturday. Engaging in physical activity clears my mind and prepares me for the challenges of each day ahead.

What message or assurance have you for the teeming and long standing stakeholders of the PUNCH Group - the readers who have been loyal over the decades, the suppliers, the workers, and the government?

A: To our valued readers, hardworking staff, esteemed government partners, and all our other stakeholders, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for their unwavering support and trust over the decades. Their loyalty has been the cornerstone of our success, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering accurate, timely, and impactful journalism.

We understand the importance of our role in society and the responsibility we carry in shaping public discourse and holding power to account.

As we navigate challenges and embrace opportunities, we assure you that we will continue to prioritise transparency, fairness, and excellence in all aspects of our operations. We are determined to innovate, adapt, and thrive in this rapidly changing world.

Together, we will chart a course towards a future where informed citizens empower our democracy, where truth prevails over misinformation, and where the values we cherish as a nation are upheld and celebrated.



TANTITA SECURITY SERVICES NIG. LTD.



PROFILE

Overview

Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited, is an indigenous company registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission.

It is enormously made up of high-end professionals. These professionals have over the years demonstrated capacity, with very rich experience and, successful achievements in protection and security services sector. Particularly, as it relates to the Oil and Gas industries, within Nigeria.

The security firm is much aware and mindful of the current security challenges and task before the petroleum industry and the need for concerted effort towards the overall protection of critical oil and gas assets.

In the face of it all, TSSNL's goal is to provide you with permanent and lasting solutions that would secure the oil and gas sector, and keep it open for business 24/7. TSSNL, remain the one stop centre for the protection of oil and gas infrastructure with Nigeria's onshore and offshore territories.

MISSION & VISION STATEMENT

01 Mission Statement

It is the mission of Tantita Security Services Nig. Ltd. to become a leader and company of choice that safely delivers world class quality services in the marine, civil, oil and gas industries and to become a contractor of choice with highly competent and efficient personnel that carry out her activities.

02 Vision Statement

Tantita Security Services Nig. Ltd. is a Nigerian indigenous company with the intention and vision of becoming a company of choice both at the national, global market and the oil & gas service industries that delivers first class quality services by building a valued relationship with its customers. To be successful, we treat our entire employee as our valued internal customer.

Our People, Our Strength

The organisation, Tantita Security Services Nig. Ltd., sources strength from diverse and dedicated team of personnel that are committed to delivering excellence in security solutions. The staff composition reflects a multi-faceted approach, bringing together skilled individuals, community stakeholders and former servicemen from different strata in order to create a comprehensive workforce.

Our direct workforce is about 8,957. These men play pivotal roles in executing and managing our security services. These individuals undergo rigorous training to ensure they meet the highest standards of professionalism, contributing significantly to the operational efficiency of Tantita Security Services.








More so, TSSNL is deeply committed to community engagement and empowerment through its overall framework of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). TSSNL have engaged about 38,221 community youths through employment initiatives, contributing to local development and providing opportunities for growth within the communities where we operate. This commitment aligns with our belief that investing in local talent not only strengthens our workforce but also fosters socio-economic development in the regions we serve.

Furthermore, our intelligence division is fortified by a team of 21,981 intelligence agents who specialise in gathering, analysing, and disseminating crucial information. These agents play a critical role in enhancing our proactive security measures, ensuring that we stay ahead of potential threats and risks.



Why Choose Us?

When it comes to safeguarding your assets, property, and events, here's why Tantita Security stands out:

- 
Local Expertise, Global Standards:
 Benefit from our extensive experience in the Nigerian security landscape. Tantita Security combines local expertise with global standards to offer you security solutions that are effective, reliable, and in tune with the unique challenges of the region.
- 
Proven Track Record:
 With a proven track record, TSSNL has successfully protected businesses, individuals, and events. Our proven history of excellence speaks volumes about our commitment to providing top-notch security services.
- 
Holistic Security Services:
 TSSNL is your one-stop-centre for holistic security services. From private security personnel and event security to cutting-edge security systems, we offer a comprehensive range of solutions tailored to your specific needs.
- 
Cutting-Edge Technology Integration:
 Stay a step ahead of potential threats with our commitment to cutting-edge technology. We seamlessly integrate the latest advancements in security technology into our solutions, ensuring that you benefit from state-of-the-art protection.
- 
Highly Trained and Vetted Personnel:
 Trust in the professionalism and expertise of our security personnel. Tantita Security ensures that our team undergoes rigorous training and thorough vetting processes, guaranteeing a skilled and trustworthy security force.
- 
Ethical and Transparent Practices:
 Integrity is the foundation of our business. Tantita Security upholds ethical standards and maintains transparency in all dealings, giving you confidence in our professional and honest approach.
- 
Proactive Risk Management:
 We don't just react to threats; we proactively manage risks. Tantita Security's strategies are designed to identify and mitigate potential risks before they become issues, providing you with proactive security measures.

Our Services

- 
Private Security Services
 - Offering protection for individuals and property.
 - Supplying private security guards and patrol officers.
- 
Security Consulting
 - Providing ideas, plans, strategy, advice, information, and assistance to meet security needs.
- 
Security Systems Solutions
 - Planning, advising, producing, installing, and selling security systems for both fixed properties and transit requirements.
 - Dealing in telecommunication systems and equipment.
- 
Security Devices Supply
 - Supplying alarms, security lights, anti-burglary devices, fire detectors.
 - Dealing in car tracking devices, access control IDs, burglary alarms, conference room device packages, CCTV wireless scanners, and smoke detectors.
- 
Import and Export of Security Products
 - Importing and exporting security and communication gadgets, walkie-talkies, wireless cables, search lamps, in-house electronics, video security gadgets, cameras, and personnel protection clothing.
- 
Education and Training
 - Organising lectures, seminars, and exhibitions.
 - Maintaining teaching aids and equipment for private and public security establishments.

Our Gallery



Contact Us

P: +234 802 282 9872
E: info@tantita.com
 1 Rifivie Close, Off Agbamu Road, DDPA,
 Ugborikoko, Uvwie LGA, Delta State, Nigeria.

I'm fulfilled – Emeritus Chairman, Ogunshola

Chief Ajibola Ogunshola studied Mathematics at the University of Ibadan and later went on to become the first black African Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries, UK. However, his career took an unexpected and unusual turn in 1987 when he accidentally became the chairman of PUNCH Nigeria Limited. A position he served in for twenty four (24) years until April 30, 2011, when he voluntarily retired.

Ogunshola, who retired from the company after repositioning the brand shared his experience in an interview published in the 30th April 2011 edition of Saturday PUNCH.

Can you share your pre-school years with us?

There is very little to remember during my pre-primary school. I was born in July 1944. At the beginning of 1949, I was taken to a school directly opposite where my mother lived, just across the road. The school, which was established in 1905, was called Olubadan School. It was opened by the colonialists at Oranyan, Ibadan, specifically to train the children of chiefs because chiefs were not sending their children to school then. I was only five years old then, but shortly after I started, probably less than a month, the school was moved to Aperin, which was very far. So, I was withdrawn and did not start school again till the following year, 1950. That is why I always say I started school in 1950 at Beyerunka, which was not far from home. I can't immediately think of pre-school events because I was still young. I lived with my mother; by the time's standard, my mother was the wealthiest woman. She was trading in clothes. She gave me more than enough money to spend. Among my peers, I had the highest pocket money. Fortunately, I was doing very well in class, particularly because of that, she showed me great affection. I was conscious of my maternal siblings like Chief Moyo Aboderin. He was the eldest of my mother's children; then Olajide Aboderin, Mrs Adisa, mother of Chief (Mrs.) Nike Akande; another sister, Odunola who is the mother of Mrs. Alabi; then Olu Aboderin, the founding chairman of PUNCH. Those are my five maternal siblings. Mrs Adisa and Sister Odunola were married and living with their husbands in Lagos. I remember one day when my mother was going to Lagos and I was on the train with her. I was on the train for the first time. At that time, the only place I knew that was tarred was Beere; the Oranyan part of Ibadan was not tarred. So, when we were on the train, each time I saw a tarred road, I would say, 'Maami, maami, ewo Beere' (mummy, mummy, see Beere!) and everybody laughed. At that time, I saw little of my dad. On his way to work from Elekuro to Mapo Hall, his car would stop in front of our house, and he would send his driver to give me six pence. Occasionally, he did so himself. He had a Opel; the nearest to it is today's SUV; you could put a lot of luggage in the back of the car. My father used to come to the house. He was what you might call a public servant. He was, first of all, a teacher. He attended Ibadan Grammar School, then he became the headmaster of Mapo Central School before he went to secondary school. Then he became a councillor, then a chief, and later, he rose to become the third in rank to the Olubadan before he died. When I was in the latter part of secondary school, we became closer, and I began to see more of him. Even the school fees, he didn't allow my mother to pay, he was the one who paid. In fact, the day I started school in GCI, September 7, 1957, he actually took me in his car and saw me to the gate and paid all the fees. Unfortunately, he died in 1964, just about three months before I entered the university. By that time, we had become quite close. While I was close to him, I was also close to my paternal siblings like the late Chief Olubunmi Ogunsola, he used to play the part of 'Alao Shaky Shaky', in a radio programme because he was a very humorous fellow. Then, the late Olumide Ogunsola, Mrs Femi Akinbiyi, Mr Abimbola Ogunsola and the late Mrs Omobonike Adesanya.

Were you an obedient boy in school?

I was not an obedient boy. I usually asked questions, and that was a problem. In Government College Ibadan at the time, there were four houses of 80 pupils each, all in boarding school. There were no day students. In each class, there were 48 students in two arms; you can see the quality of education that we had and we were very much pampered. They gave us soap, a blazer with the school badge etc. I was a scholar as a result of my performance in the entrance examination. The grapevine said that I came first in the examination and got a scholarship, but my mother was actually concerned that the scholarship could have been given to someone who really needed it because she could afford to pay. Because I used to ask questions, seniors didn't like me and I got into trouble with them. Fortunately for me, I was doing very well academically, and even though many people didn't like me, they

IN MY OWN CASE WHEN I BECAME CHAIRMAN OF PUNCH, IT WAS MADE CLEAR THAT PUNCH WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO PURSUE ANY PARTISAN INTEREST

were forced to respect me. I was not very good at sports; the only sport I was good at was swimming, where I was an average swimmer. I played a bit of hockey, but I was of no use in football. It is amazing that some of the strongest boys at the time, boys who had all the sinews and all, are dead and we are still alive. I was alarmed when Victor Ojutalayo, probably the finest athlete of our generation, died at 56. School life does not predict what happens thereafter, and if the prefects had known that at that time, they probably would have been less harsh than they were in handling the junior students. Socially, I was the president of the Literary and Debating Society, which really exposed me to other schools. I was also an important member of the Dramatic Society, which also exposed me to students from other schools. In those days, to the best of my knowledge, very few people went to the extent of sleeping with their girlfriends. Some people did but it was very rare.

You were the president of the Literary and Debating Society, even as a science student. You must have been an all-rounder.

The truth is that at that time, the most brilliant boys in GCI were generally all-rounders. Sometimes, it was hard to decide whether to go for sciences or arts. I can count some people. Akin Omigbodun was an all-rounder too. I had A1 in English, A1 in Mathematics and Additional Mathematics, A2 in Latin, A2 in Literature, and A2 in Physics and Chemistry. Olugbodun had about the same result as some other people. Before us were two brilliant boys, Jibayo Akinrimisi and Jide Ogunlana. Akinrimisi died some years ago, he was a senior lecturer or professor at the University of Lagos. He had a PhD in Physics from a top American university. He and Jide Ogunlana were the best in the class. Ogunlana also went to an American university. He completed his first degree, his master's and probably his PhD but then he ran into some problems, not criminal. He also became a lecturer in Ife.

Why did you study Actuarial Science at a time when Law and Medicine were seen as choice careers?

After my school certificate, when deciding on what to do at the Higher School Certificate, I had the option of going into the humanities or the sciences. Our principal, D. J. Bullock, tried to persuade many of us to go into the arts, but many of us boys who were very good at mathematics were considering engineering. We didn't even think of taking a degree in mathematics because mathematicians were seen as eccentric at that time. There was a feeling then that you could only become a teacher with a degree in mathematics. There was nothing like computer science. At that time, I didn't even know that there was a subject called Statistics until I got to my first year at higher school. If I had thought of being a lawyer, maybe I might have considered



• Ogunshola

going into the arts but in GCI at the time, nobody thought that being a lawyer was worth it. If you went into arts, it was either you wanted to go and be a university professor in English or something. When I said I would like to do Pure and Applied Mathematics as two of my subjects for HSC, he even tried to persuade me to take either Latin or English as the third subject to show you how much he had hopes in me to do arts. But at the end, I told myself that if I did that, my hope of being an engineer would be dashed. So, I did Pure and Applied Mathematics and Physics. In December 1963, I completed the HSC examination. Engineering was unavailable in Nigerian universities except Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Lagos. Before I put in for university admission, I discussed with my brother, Chief Moyosore Aboderin, in his house, and he asked me what I intended to do at the university. I told him I wanted to apply for Engineering at UNILAG and Mathematics at the University of Ibadan. He said there is a course called Actuarial Science, which is highly paying in the United Kingdom. He was a VIP and had been rich from his youth. Among those who contested the election in 1951 to the then House of Assembly, he won the highest votes, and he was richer than any of them. He was in the cocoa trade, and by this time, he had become a director of a multinational insurance company called Eaglestar Insurance Company, which had established a branch in Nigeria. It was one of the leading insurance companies in the UK, and when they wanted to establish a trading branch, he was one of those appointed as a director. From his business travels abroad, he interacted with their directors and came across actuaries. Actuaries were very highly respected in the insurance industry, and they almost always became managing directors of the companies eventually, and even when they didn't become MD, they were very highly paid. I said okay, after my mathematics degree in Ibadan, I would consider becoming an actuary. Although it is not compulsory, it is advisable that when you are studying for actuarial exams you should be working with either an insurance company or actuarial consulting company in the

UK. With his connection, he got that for me easily and got me a job permit while studying in the UK. He had done a similar thing for his own younger brother, Olu Aboderin, many years before, in 1957, when he went to study in the UK. He had gone abroad to study law but it was through Chief Moyo's connection that he got him what is called an articleship to be able to become a chartered accountant. It was compulsory then to be an articled clerk to become a chartered accountant, and without that, he would never have become an accountant. There were two qualifications then, the Institute of Chartered Accountants and Institute of Certified and Corporate Accountants. If you become an associate of the first one, you put ACA after your name, and if you become an associate of the second, you put an ACCA. Before I went to the university here in Nigeria, Chief Moyo had wanted me even to go and do my Maths degree in London. Actually, he had submitted my papers, and I got an admission to study Maths over there, but some people, including Dr. Lekan Are, who is a cousin, told the family, 'Jibola kere, e ma je ko lo ilu eebo nkekere. Awon toba lo ilu eebo nkekere, won maa nya iyakuya nigba mi (You shouldn't allow Jibola to go abroad, he is too young. Young men who travel abroad often become rascals)'.

That was the main reason why I did my first degree here. There were one or two other personal reasons, but that was a major factor.

You once said you would have come out with a first class, but you got distracted in your second year. Who or what was the distraction?

At the end of my first year at the university, I did very well and became a university scholar. In those days, for those who did well at the end of the first year, the pride was to be called a university scholar, not so much for the money. To some people, money was very important, but to me, it was not so important. Number one, my mother could afford it. More importantly, I was already a Shell-BP scholar based on my performance in the HSC examination results. I had an 'A' in Applied Mathematics, an 'A' in Pure Mathematics and a 'B' in Physics. The 'B' in Physics was because I failed the practical and the rule was that once you failed the practical, you could never get an 'A'. Professor Ayo Banjo taught us English briefly during high school in preparation for essay writing in the general paper. Because of my Shell-BP scholarship, I had a lot of money and lived like a king, I had to turn down the university scholarship, though I requested to retain the title of a university scholar. I had money, bought house coats, about two or three types, had a pipe, and smoked Henry Moore tobacco. It had an aroma that would be all over the building when it was smoked. I don't know whether it still exists. I didn't drink much because my stomach couldn't take it. Even with tobacco smoking, I had to stop it when I got to England because I found that it was affecting my colon. I didn't make a first class for three reasons. First, I did not work as hard as before. Two, perhaps, if I had been abroad where extra coaching would have been available, I would have enjoyed the abstract aspect of mathematics. And third, without meaning to be unfair to my teachers but also to say the truth, most of the teaching was not good. A notable exception to that was Dr. Omololu Olunloyo. He actually went all out to teach us very well. Professor J. C. Ezeilo, who became the VC of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, also tried. He is still alive and is based in the US. Most of the other teachers, white or black, I did not enjoy their teaching. I assumed that I would make a first class based on my performance at the end of the first year but for the reasons I have given you. I almost made a 2.1; unfortunately, that year, Pastor W. F. Kumuyi, who came first in the class, had a grasp of mathematics to a level that he scored a very high mark on the whole. If his mark was not so high, the mark I got that year would have qualified me for a 2.1. I remember Olunloyo used the expression, 'Kumuyi destroyed the fortunes of all of you.' There were two or three subjects that I regretted taking, but it didn't worry me too much since I wasn't going to be a university teacher. I made up for it by becoming the first black African to qualify as a fellow of the Institute of Actuaries in the UK because I worked very well.

What aspects of your training prepared you for your role as the MD of a foremost insurance company and later as Chairman of PUNCH?

An actuary is somebody who has been trained to apply mathematics and, perhaps more broadly, statistics to financial problems. So, I was a trained mathematician and then the subjects that you had to do to become an actuary dealt with mathematics, probability, statistics and economics. You are trained in investment matters and later on in pension administration, life insurance management and investment management, especially institutional investment. My first job here in Nigeria was as the Head of the Life Department of NICON. I was fortunate that NICON had just started when I was about to finish, so I applied to be the Head of the Life Department. They came to interview me in London, and I got the job. Yet, I still had one more paper to finish and I had to go back the following year to write it. The story of my going back to write that paper often comes to my mind from time to time because of what happened. As Head of the Life Department, four or five managers were reporting to me. Yinka Lijadu was, first of all, the Head of the Fire Department, but just before I came in, he was promoted to assistant general manager. Mr. Lawson was Head of Sales, he is dead now; Mr. I. C. Ejiogu, the father of Tony Elumelu's wife, was the company secretary. There was one Mr. Olawuyi, he is dead now though, he was over 80 before he died. He was the Head of the Accident Department. There was one Mr. S.O. Onawola, who is also dead, he was the chief accountant. I became Head of Life at 28 in 1972. In 1973, when I wanted to go back for my final paper, I filled out the form to apply for a visa to the UK, and my application was supported by the MD of NICON, Mr. Derrick Garston-Jones. When I got to the interviewer, then you wouldn't stand in front of a cubicle; it was a room where a white man was at the other end, and you were sitting very far from him. Something happened, and we got into a small argument, and then he said, 'Shut up, and if you don't shut up, I won't give you a visa.' I remember it, and I often say it was the first time in my life when I accepted humiliation. I had to shut up because, number one, I had to go for the exams; if I didn't get that visa, I would not go to sit for the exams. Two, if I didn't complete the exams, I wouldn't be a Fellow, and fellowship was the actual qualification in that field. Three, the amount of estacode for me for the three months was a lot of money at that time. Of course, there was no way I would spend up to half of the amount approved for me. So, it was important to me that I shut up, so it came to pass that I had to shut up. Each time I remember, I shake my head and say yes, there are times in life when you have to accept humiliation. I didn't stop there, I got my visa but I was looking for a way of getting back at the man and so when I got back to the office, I complained to the white MD that the man who interviewed me was very rude. I said maybe he did that because he did not like black people. I told him that he humiliated me though I was a senior government official (NICON was then a government organisation) and that I would like him to write a protest letter to the UK office, and he wrote it. The training as an actuary prepared me to run the life department and it also exposed me to managing people. My deputy was Mrs. Olubusi, she was a life insurance expert but not an actuary. Also, I was a manager at NICON at 28, whereas the average age of the other managers was over 40. Shortly after, NICON bought over Niger Insurance Company, which had been dormant. It was formerly called Yorkshire Insurance Company and was being run as a multinational. When NICON bought it, I was made the general manager and we revived it and started doing life and non-life business, then I was just 30. In fact, my



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I MADE UP FOR IT BY BECOMING THE FIRST BLACK AFRICAN TO QUALIFY AS A FELLOW OF THE INSTITUTE OF ACTUARIES IN THE UK

secretary was older than I was, and all those who were reporting to me were older than I was. That also gave me experience in management apart from financial knowledge. Essentially, I can say that my principal training as a mathematician and as an actuary is to think because thinking is the key to success. We don't succeed in this part of the world because we don't think. Thinking is strenuous. Thinking is not easy. Apart from analytical thinking, I have a strong background in the English language, which has been very useful.

How did you get into the United Nations Pension Fund? Was it by appointment or by recommendation?

In 1975, I was going into my office after lunch at Niger Insurance and as I was passing in front of the reception, the receptionist handed me a telegram which said I had been appointed to the committee of actuaries in the UN Pensions Fund. It stated that I would represent the African region in the committee of actuaries of the UN Pensions Board and that the committee met once a year in New York. The first thing that struck me was that I would go to New York every year and travel first class. Then, I was just 31 years old, and the telegram was signed by one Mr. Arthur Liveran, secretary to the UN Pensions Fund. At that time, I did not know how it happened or who chose me. All I knew was that I was the only black African who was a fellow of the Institute of Actuaries UK, and I was highly regarded. Before I left, there were other telegrams and a letter signed personally by Mr. Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations then. The letter is in my office at home.

Three weeks later, I travelled first class, Pan America Airways, to New York. They sent me bulky documents to read and it was a lot of work for our committee to review what a firm of consulting actuaries in New York had done and then make recommendations to the board. I represented the African region, and the other four members in 1975 were Robert Myers (US and Western Europe), Prof. Chetyrkin (Soviet Union), Kumio Takeuchi (Japanese, Asia), and Gonzalo Arroba (Latin America). There was also a 'member emeritus', Mr. Netter, from France. Later on, I tried to find out how the appointment came about and it was the secretary to the board who said it was my government that nominated me. I found out that it was somebody in the Nigeria office in the UN who said there was a Nigerian actuary when they were discussing the issue then. That was because it was very much in the news when I qualified as the first black African fellow of the Institute of Actuaries of the United Kingdom. The appointment affected my life a lot subsequently. I was able to make a few contacts in New York; I was also able to put some money together from my allowances, which enabled me to pay for my children's school fees in American universities. Even though at that time, there was exchange control, I didn't have to go through that because I saved a few dollars from my daily allowances. Later on, I became the chairman of the committee. Then there was a bit of

the cold war between the West and the Soviet on the board and as a non-aligned, I was able to douse tensions. By the time I became chairman after being a member for 10 years, I had had a lot of experience at board level at Niger Insurance and also here as Chairman of PUNCH. Even before I became the chairman, they found out that I had a way of intervening in discussions, like an informal moderator. When I became chairman, things became better and they liked my role because I was an experienced chairman. I would throw a joke at the appropriate time and everybody would laugh and then we would go on. I was chairman for about 20 years until I left after 31 years. When I left in 2006, at the end of my service, my letter of commendation was signed by Mr. Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of the UN. When I was appointed into the committee at 31, no other person was under 44, the youngest among them was the Russian, who was 47.

When was the first time you came in contact with journalists and journalism, and what were your impressions?

I remember that I went to the office of Mr Peter Osugo, a veteran journalist in the Daily Times at the time, and I told him that I just passed the fellowship of the Institute of Actuaries. I used to come to see my brother at the old PUNCH office occasionally and I remember I was excited the first time I saw Mr. Sam Amuka in person. The excitement was because he was not big in size, looked boyish and was always wearing jeans and denim top materials. I came across some of the editors working for my brother then, either in his house or office. Then there was Innocent Adikwu who was Editor of the PUNCH, who I thought at that time was pro-NPN and I used to tell my brother because I knew my brother was mentally pro-Awo. Whenever I saw a story that was either pro-NPN, or I felt was overdone, I used to tell my brother. By the time I interacted with Jakande, he was already governor and I would not call that an interaction with a journalist. I met Alhaji Babatunde Jose for the first time when I was working as a consultant actuary and I wanted to find out about the pension arrangement for the staff of Daily Times. I might have gone there either as a consultant or MD of Niger Insurance, I can't remember. At that stage, I got the impression that journalism is a very difficult job, which was clear to me. You had to go to work early in the morning and return late at night and I wondered how they managed. I remember one day, my brother told me about how he got wind of a story that had been written and which would be published the following day and that he didn't think it was right for it to be published. So, my brother gave instructions to the editor that the story should not be published. At about 11pm, my brother went to where they were making the plates and discovered the story was on the front page. He removed the plate himself and called the boys around to put something else there. Another one, I was with him in the car, and we were going towards Abeokuta, and he saw a story in the paper and remarked that he knew the author of the story and smelled 'something' about the motive behind it. Also, I was fortunate to read Times of London, Harold Evans' Good Times Bad Times, in which he talked about his experience as editor of Times of London. I read it thoroughly and enjoyed it; I saw his bitterness. It affected my approach to journalists working in PUNCH because people set up newspapers for different purposes. Some do it to make money; others have some ideas to propagate, and others still for influence. There is no way the views of the publisher and the journalists at the top level will not clash. So, it is easier if the



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owner is known to take a particular position; for example, if he is a conservative, then he makes sure he recruits an editor who shares similar views. Similarly, if it is the other way, you must recruit someone with the same views. In my own case when I became chairman of PUNCH, it was made clear that PUNCH was not supposed to pursue any partisan interest and if it is not meant to pursue any partisan interest, then it means that you can tell the gentlemen that what they require is the ethical standards. For example, we were anti-military which was popular with people and helped sell our paper. Also, there were times, which were coincident with the anti-military thing, when we appeared to be supporting Yoruba interests. For us to have done otherwise would have been suicidal because of where we were located at that terrible period. So, one requires the careful management of all these factors. The other side of being committed to any particular political position is that some editors and those below them need some direction. They want to know what the board thinks about this to guide them. If there is no such direction, then those who want to be corrupt are likely to find it easier to be so, whereas if they know that what they want to do is against the interest and position of the organisation, they will be careful. So what one tends to do therefore is to try and gauge the conscience of the people, the public mood. When necessary, we may go against the public mood, like when we campaigned in favour of the removal of petroleum subsidies, even though we knew it was not popular. So, you have to balance so many factors if you don't want to go against your surroundings and at the same time, you don't want to be sectional, you want to maintain a pan Nigerian audience. In any case, you want to employ people from various parts of the country. When (Olusegun) Obasanjo was president before the third term issue, a number of people came to me to complain that the PUNCH was against Obasanjo who is Yoruba. I told them that 'You people think that PUNCH is a Yoruba paper, it is only the publisher that is Yoruba, the people who are working there are from different parts of the country. I can't be telling them not to carry a story that I know is true'. We do everything we can to make sure we satisfy everybody; that is where our strength lies and people respect us for our credibility. There are times people think that the PUNCH is owned by Tinubu and all that nonsense. This is not the first time. In those days, people said that it was Abiola who owned PUNCH but when he ran into trouble and Concord was affected, people began to think otherwise. When we are talking of journalism, I think that journalism is a difficult job. One thing that I can say in favour of the profession, and I will like it to be mentioned, is that journalists who have gone into governance on the whole have performed far better than the average politician. Chief Lateef Jakande, Chief Segun Osoba, Smart Adeyemi, especially on the FOI bill, Pa Anthony Enahoro and the late Chief Olabisi Onabanjo did well. I think part of the reasons is that in the course of their work, they are exposed to a very broad range of knowledge. They have a lot of information. Another reason is that the journalist in government is aware that he is under watch and he is likely to be more embarrassed if he is found to have done something wrong because as a journalist, people look up to him for certain values. That is not to say that there are no bad journalists. That is why it is very important that people are well paid because most human beings who are under financial pressure tend to look outside. It is important that journalists are well paid, even though I don't know anybody in the whole world who is earning enough money.

What were your fears and expectations when you became the chairman?

"The founding chairman became ill sometime in 1982 and I remember one day he called me and showed me a paper on which he had scribbled extensively and the heading was Operation Gubajoguns. He said he wanted to sponsor me to be governor of Oyo State. The only person who knew about that was Osuolale Mustapha, a former General Manager of PUNCH. But I told him I did not have the temperament for politics and somehow, the idea died there because I didn't show interest. Then, when the military was preparing to take over power, a few days to the time, he heard about it through Abiola. I used to meet Abiola in his place. Apparently, my brother had been talking with Abiola and both of them had been saying that this is the kind of person that should be minister when the military took over and I would just laugh. When my brother died, he left a will which was contested and annulled. I was one of the executors named in that will. Eventually, following a family rift, the court annulled the will. Meanwhile, I was already on the board and we brought in Lola Aboderin and there was also Mr. Wale Aboderin. The board decided to invite Chief Moyo Aboderin, even though he was senior in age to the late founding chairman, because the board found out that unless substantial money was injected into PUNCH, the paper was going to die. Chief Moyo had a dilemma of either sitting down in his house, keeping his money to himself and watching the thing die or putting in substantial money into it to prevent it from dying. Even when Awolowo came to commiserate with him on the death of his brother, he told him that he must not let PUNCH die and people were also looking up to him. So he decided to put in money. Now, how do you put in a substantial sum of money without being able to direct the affairs of an organisation? So the only way he could do it was to become the chairman. He spent so much money. For example, the machine that was being used before the chairman died belonged to the stone age. Before he died, the company had ordered a new machine from Eastern Germany. The machine had arrived but the balance of money required to pay for the machine and the cost of bringing in experts was unavailable. So, for about 18 months, the machine was lying in the rain, though packaged. Chief Moyo had to pay all that was required to get it installed and I think it was Emeka Omeruah who came to

inaugurate the new machine. There were other ways Chief Moyo helped the organisation. Unfortunately, he too died on January 14, 1987. So, based on my exposure and experience, I was appointed the chairman on February 20, 1987. My two brothers had died, there I was as chairman. Also, there was a family dispute about the will of my brother because my brother had children from more than one woman. I had a burden on my head as chairman and I knew I had a duty to make it successful. So, when we say today we never took loan under my chairmanship, one should also add that there was nobody who would have been ready to give us any loan. I must thank the board and management because we did a lot of brainstorming. There were times, we would have meetings from 10am into the night and only take a break for few minutes and I would eat whatever I could lay my hands on, usually biscuits. I must equally thank the board for reposing trust in me. For example, when PUNCH was closed down, I don't remember now whether it was the first one or the prolonged one by Abacha, I had to sign a cheque taking all the money into my own personal account. The first time when the PUNCH was closed down under Babangida, it was very harrowing. We were closed down for six weeks and if the closure had been one month longer, PUNCH would have died. Because at that time, we were still struggling financially and the family dispute was there. When PUNCH was closed down, I didn't socialise with anybody in the military, so I didn't know who to go to to get the paper reopened. I knew that Abiola was close to the military but he was not my first choice. I said the best thing was to see whether I could use the traditional rulers because the military used to respect them. One day, I left my house in Agbara Estate and went to the late Olubadan, Oba Asanike. Incidentally, my own father had been instrumental to his elevation in rank. I told him that the paper that used to defend the interest of the people and that is owned by an Ibadan man had been closed, 'what can you do to help?' Oba Asanike said, 'Ha, paper omoo mi.' He picked up his phone and called Alaaafin in my presence. He said, 'Lamidi, oogbo wipe won ti paper omoo mi ni?' I think Alaaafin said he was aware and he said, 'O si daale?' (And you kept quiet) It was the first and the last time I would hear that deep Yoruba - Oyo expression and it was so funny. Alaaafin then promised to help and he asked me to meet him somewhere because he was visiting Ibadan at the time. That was 1990 because I had become the Baaroyin Ibadan and that was the reason I went to Oba Asanike in the first place. Alaaafin promised to do something and said his main contact with the military was Abiola. The same afternoon, in spite of the terrible state of the roads, I had to face Ile-Ife. Then, Ooni was believed to be close to the military and again, because of the tussle between him and Alaaafin, I wanted to be diplomatic and involve the two of them. I got to Ife towards the evening, even though I hadn't told the Ooni I was coming. When I got to the palace, I just said they should tell him that the chairman of PUNCH had come to see him. When he came in, he said, 'Ah, chairman PUNCH, e wa si aafin wa leni?(So, you came on a visit?)' I responded 'Beeni'.

Again, I had to play it both ways, some bit of humility and at the same time, I wasn't going to completely surrender my dignity. I tried to be as diplomatic as possible. I prostrated for him and I narrated what happened to him and he said, 'Maa so fun won.' I left Ile Ife about 8pm and I arrived at Agbara Estate around 2am.

With that first experience of the first closure when we could not access our money and also from what we knew about the closure of Chris Okolie's Newbreed, we knew we had to prepare. When Abacha came and PUNCH was among those spearheading the opposition to his rule, we knew that we might be closed down. So we put our heads together and we rehearsed far ahead, telling everybody what they should do in case of closure. We actually practised in advance and everyone was asked to write down what they were supposed to do. And lo and behold, they came and immediately they came, I gave a written backdated instruction to transfer the entire balance to my personal account. In fact, I didn't have a personal account with the bank, so I had to open the account the same day, sign every necessary paper and ensure that the money was moved into my new account the same day. So, it was from that account that we were able to do some skeletal things throughout the entire 18 months of closure. I thank the board for not taking me to task on this because if they didn't trust me, putting the company's money in my personal account under any circumstance looked fishy but for their understanding.

PUNCH was close to dying by the time you took over, what magic did you do for the turnaround of the paper?

Brainstorming. In those days, we would sit down for meetings starting by 9am and finished by 11pm because there were so many issues to trash. The day of the Ikeja Cantonment bomb blast, we were at a meeting on that day, and I was coming to the PUNCH's old office from faraway Agbara Estate, and I would go back in the night. Hard work, analyses and perhaps my own personal contribution. I was trying to ensure as much as possible, we put a measure to whatever we wanted to do. We tried as much as possible to get information. Essentially, we did a lot of brainstorming and thinking. We were not always right, as it happened in the issue of the Internet paywall thing, which was necessary, but the market was not ready for it. And also, the payment system had not yet become so widespread and the trouble to get recharge cards to use and the cost of printing the cards hampered the arrangement. Sometimes, we reverse ourselves. Something one has learnt about management is that it is not always necessary to be the first to introduce something. I can assure you that THE PUNCH under my leadership would probably never have been the first to introduce colour pages because it was a gamble. It is not the type of gamble I would take as the Chairman. I say gamble because it brought the cost of the production of the paper to a much higher level and to recoup that you have to charge higher and raise the advert rates. So, it is a good thing in terms of making the paper more appealing to people and entering a new colour age and, therefore, we must congratulate the Chairman of ThisDay for pioneering it. We decided that we would have a go at it because they went into it and of course, there is no doubt that within a short time, we surpassed everybody in quality. There are things that, you should wait for other people to do; that is what I'm saying. That is my approach. When something is risky, sometimes you wait for someone to do it first because of the implications. One other thing which we did that was very good was refusing to take unsold copies and it was a battle; a big battle.

What is PUNCH's unique selling point?

Credibility, that is the main point. Secondly, trying to be fair; but fairness is in the eyes and mind of the person who is judging. So whatever you do, however you try, somebody will always say you are not trying; but I know management has been trying its best to be fair. Management tries to insist that if a story is carried, we try to get all sides of the story and I have always said whenever I have cause to have meetings with the management that it does not mean that PUNCH has to be neutral. What is important is to be fair. A paper can stand for something; the only thing is that whatever you stand for should be broadly in the public interest. You cannot say that because you want to be neutral, you must write something that justifies corruption in a matter that is before the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. You don't have to be neutral. You must stand for values that are recognised as promoting the well-being of the system. There was a time, many years ago, when advertisers were asking what our unique selling point was: are we appealing to the middle class, the upper class, or to the drivers and mechanics? This is because some of our competitors told them that PUNCH was not read by the elite but by mechanics. In any event, that died because, over time, it became obvious that the elite read PUNCH. It (criticism) also helps sometimes because one must not admit that one has total knowledge. Some of the criticisms were useful because we beefed up the business pages and how political events were reported. There were enhancements here and there. So, some of the criticisms helped to ensure that as much as possible, we got a broad range of people

who read the paper.

Which moments in PUNCH's history will you describe as pivotal? And what are the major milestones of your tenure?

A leader has to take responsibility. Even when I come in the morning and tell the management team that something occurred to me during the night, we still have to fight it out, and it is rare for me to overrule. The only time I overrule is when I think I have not been understood. There are a few occasions when they are not convinced simply because they have not gotten what I was trying to say and also when I think that the matter is urgent and a decision has to be taken immediately. Quite often, especially in the past, I used to say that I take responsibility for a decision even when I know it may go wrong. If it goes wrong after trying to implement it, then we change it, but we try as much as possible to get sufficient information on which to take action and brainstorm and try to go into the nitty-gritty of things. We think and think. Someone said you must think and think and think until it hurts. Having thought and thought and thought, you will then need to implement it properly. The implementation stage is another thing and may need to be changed again when you get to the field. But we have worked very hard here and I am happy that our work has turned out well.

Thinking and implementation are qualitative; can you tell us the milestones of the company in quantitative terms?

The paper was eight pages at one time; at another time, it was 16 pages. In those days, it was a miracle if we got to 24 pages. Other newspapers at the time were 24 pages, but at the time I became Chairman, it was rare to have 24 pages; it was either eight or 16 pages. Circulation is another; everyone agrees that we are the leader in circulation. We are unparalleled in aesthetic quality. In terms of being well paid, our staff are doing well compared to their counterparts in other newspapers and magazines. Since we were re-opened in 1993 after the closure by Abacha for 18 months, we have not missed a month's salary. We have the highest quality and biggest printing machine in black Africa, if it is taken as one single unit. To the best of my knowledge, even in South Africa, they don't have the type of printing press in a single unit. We have built two head offices.

As of 1987, the first one had been plastered, but the electrical, plumbing and conduit systems were not installed. We completed that and had it launched with fanfare on February 28, 1997, to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the death of the founding Chairman. We have never had cause to borrow or ask any external shareholder to invest money. Then we have this new building which we completed in phases. We made a decision that turned out to be a good decision: we will not try to do everything at once. We would never have finished if we had tried to do everything at once. Firstly, we built part of it, which was the printing part, that houses the printing machine, and from there, we made more money and built the second part even though the design of the building took place at the same time—that may be a lesson for others. This building took a lot of work and it involved great details; the size of room, how one part of the building would flow into another, where the visitors would sit, etc. Our architect was even sent abroad to go and see some printing houses. Not only to see the printing areas but also the main buildings. We gave them specific buildings to go to. Some of the board members also went to some printing houses abroad, including Finland, the United Kingdom, and Barcelona in Spain. So this complex is not just a matter of chance or miracle, it is a product of thinking. We worked at it.

PUNCH's policy about loans has always intrigued people. How did you arrive at it and how did you manage to ward off the temptation to borrow at difficult times?

Let me begin with myself. I had enough knowledge of financial matters. After looking at the situation at that time, nobody would consider giving us a loan. There were a lot of existing loans on the ground when I came here. There was a day I hid under the table from creditors. There was another day they said I had travelled to Ile-Ife and that the creditors should come back the following day.

When a kind Igbo man, I can't remember his name but I think he is dead now. He was a good human being; he was sympathetic to us. He was asked to come and execute the judgment after giving us plenty of time. He came and started removing the air conditioners, but the management begged him, saying that I had travelled but that he should come back by 1pm the following day. He agreed and left. I wasn't at Ife, I was around. I wasn't coming every day. I usually came three times a week, and at most, four times in a week. Minimum two times a week, averagely three times a week or occasionally four times a week, but I never came throughout the week. Immediately after he left, we filed all types of things to delay the payment, and by 9 am the following day, we served the lawyer. He was very angry but we begged him and told him we had to do it because we wanted to survive. There was another case where lawyer Fola Alkinrisola executed a fife on our property. He was a lawyer to PUNCH and I don't want to talk much about him because he is dead and cannot defend himself. He took us to court for not paying him. I also remember the case of Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya. Ogunsanya had been libelled. In those days, journalists, on the whole, were more reckless in terms of libel because of politics and military rule. The judgment was given in Ogunsanya's favour and we had no money. So, the general manager, Mustapha and I went to his house, and we must have prostrated at least 15 times, begging him to please forget it. It was not a question of reducing the money but that he should waive it. It was a lot of money then, about N600,000. It was very big money to us then, and there was no way we would have paid it. It was not a case of letting us agree to a mode of payment because we owed about three banks, and we were still trying to settle those ones. After begging him so many times, he said that, unfortunately, when lawyers get a judgment, it is difficult to convince them to give up like that. When we found out that he wasn't changing his mind, we filed something again in court to delay it. Then we took the entire board of directors to go and see his lawyer, A.M Agbamuche, because Ogunsanya put everything on his lawyer. When we got there, Agbamuche treated us politely and we went away thinking that was the end of the matter, but they continued. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the judiciary is useful for getting what you want and preventing somebody else from getting what they want. We continued to file several things here and there. Then, the court said that we should deposit the judgment deed, let's have it both ways. Let's give them half and let's keep half. We made a move, but they refused, and we decided to leave it there. They won't get it, we won't get it too. I must say that luck has been with us and it is not as if we are happy that some people died. For example, suppose there had been no Oku Iboku. In that case, I mean the newsprint manufacturing company near Calabar in Cross Rivers State, where we could get newsprint locally in small quantities, there was no way we would have made it at that time. We would have been buying newsprint at cutthroat prices locally, and it is not likely we would have made it. Apart from trying to be visionary, one of the most important elements of success is cost cutting. You have to be very careful about cost. There is no organisation or human being who cannot be ruined. Three things ruin organisations, and I'm not mentioning them in any particular order: cost, strategic mistakes, and not responding to the market appropriately. That is my experience. Cost has always been a problem and it will continue to be a problem in the industry.

What is success to you, and what would you describe as life's most important tools for success?

Frankly, this is a very serious question. What I find interesting about this question is that your concept of success, what you think is success, can change with time, even during your lifetime, which is a pity. You find people when they are young, they think money is not important, and they see something else as important and they pursue it. Later in life, they wish they had tried to make money early. Some people pursue money for their whole lives because they believe it is the only important thing. Maybe something happens to them, making them question whether money alone is the most important. This thing depends upon your theatre of operation. If you are an academic and you are recognised by your colleagues in that field, and you are in a society where your remuneration is sufficient to send your children to good schools

A PAPER CAN STAND FOR SOMETHING; THE ONLY THING IS THAT WHATEVER YOU STAND FOR SHOULD BE BROADLY IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

and you can afford a good, moderate car, and your name is everywhere, you can feel satisfied even though you don't have tons of money. That is a level of success. Generally speaking, because money is the medium of exchange, what you can do for other people depends upon how much money you have; the person who can give that money is regarded as successful. So, in most societies, money is still the most frequently mentioned index for success. If two people are fighting over N100,000 and someone tells them to stop fighting and he gives each N100,000, that will be the end of the fight. That is just a simple example. You want to do an operation, and everybody is worried, and someone comes forward and offers, say, N5m instead of N3m required, the person that was helped when he gets better if he sees his benefactor stealing money in the future, he would turn a blind eye. So, somehow, fortunately, or unfortunately, money is regarded as a medium of success; therefore, a person should not aim to be poor. You must always have that in the back of your mind. Two, you should try and enjoy whatever you are doing because that greatly compensates for money. If you enjoy what you are doing and you can pay bills, satisfaction can compensate a lot for money, but one should not be poor. If the society continues to grow, many people can be happy without having much money. I have discussed success with my younger children many times and because they live abroad they believe you don't need money to succeed. In the society they live, there are many ways of being relevant. Some people are multimillionaires; they wish to be like those who won Pulitzer prizes and are probably not rich. It is because there are so many avenues for distinction in the society. So the definition of success depends on the society one lives in.

People see you as a disciplinarian, so how would you describe yourself?

You cannot run an organisation without discipline. Whether you like discipline or not, if you want the organisation to succeed, you must close your eyes and do some things. As human beings, nobody wants to be disciplined, everybody wants freedom. Animals roam in the wild, and human beings do, too. Do you allow them to do what they want to do so? Do you think anyone wants to come to work every day? There are days you feel like not coming to work. For human progress, certain systems have been set up, and you have to follow them. If you want to escape from them, you have to go and face self-employment and the consequences. When we were in primary school, some teachers or headmasters would cane people with such ferocity that you would know that they were wicked people. That is not being a disciplinarian. There is a difference between being a wicked person and being a disciplinarian. Discipline means that things have to be done in a particular way, and you have to insist they are done in that way; otherwise, there will be chaos and disorder.

You retired at 66, strong and healthy

I was almost 67 when I retired. I knew this question would come up. In Nigeria, people don't retire, they change jobs. At 67, in a proper economy, a person my age should have saved enough money not to have to stress himself again. That is how it should be. Of course, people are living longer now than before. In the time of my father, very few people lived beyond 75. My father died in 1964 at 67, going to 68. Chief Moyo Aboderin died early in 1987, he was 67. So, I have reached the age of dying. Of course, longevity has improved, so people are living longer. When I came back from abroad in 1972, I remember when we went to the birthday parties held for 80-year-olds, the 80-year-olds were really old men and women. It was a huge event when we went for Chief Okunowo's 80th birthday in Ijebu-Ode. He was holding a walking stick and one person was holding him. Now there are so many 85-year-olds who are walking about the whole place. Even 90-year-olds are walking straight all over the place. Longevity has improved, so people like us can aim to reach 90. Essentially, let me say that I will not stress myself. If I am consulted by the private sector or given an assignment, which is temporary and part-time or if it's something by a government that I believe in and can help the country, which is equally temporary and part-time, I will consider doing it. But they must pay my expenses. People think that you can have things free. No, the skill you have acquired, you acquired them over time. People are encouraged in this country to look for things free. A friend of mine who is a medical doctor and a skin specialist retired from government work, and a number of his family members and friends were going to him routinely for consultation after he had retired. I had a problem so I went to see him. After he gave me the prescription, I asked how much he would charge, and he laughed. He said how could he charge me. I said to him, 'You are a pensioner. You trained to be a doctor. What are you supposed to live upon if you are not charging people?' he laughed and saw the point. I insisted and gave him some money. People say things like, 'He is my brother now, I shouldn't pay him.' But that is his livelihood, you should pay him. So I don't believe in giving things free as a rule. If there is a cause to give things free, then there would be a real proven cause, and I would have to be satisfied that in the circumstances, I ought to give it free.

You appear to be very fond of your late brother, the founding chairman, how did you feel that the mantle of leadership passed to another generation of your family?

First, there are some other shareholders of PUNCH who are not family members. Their shareholding is not much but you must recognise them. When somebody has died, there is nothing to suggest that he has anything again to do in this world. Myself and members of the family on the board, the MD, the former GM, the various managements that we have worked with, we have done our best and I know that the family recognises that we have done our best.

How do you want to be remembered in PUNCH?

I will answer in the short term, the middle term and the long term. That's how I analyse my things. In the short time, it is not how I wish to be remembered, it is left to people to decide how they want to remember me. It is not how I wish to be remembered that matters, it is those who will come after that will remember me. They will remember me the way they find appropriate. For me, what is important to me is that as chairman, I did my best. I am fulfilled. Under my quarter-century leadership of mostly dedicated board and staff, not only did the PUNCH rise to eminent heights, but that throughout the period, our team remained a strong and positive voice in the long and arduous process of bringing Nigeria from darkness into light. In the medium and long term, how many people are remembered by anybody 100 years after they have died? And how many companies have survived for more than 100 years anywhere in the world? Of course, people are living longer now and it is possible for many people to be alive to see their great grandchildren. Therefore, the great grandchildren may faintly remember how their great grandfather looked like. So occasionally, their great grandfather may come into their consciousness but otherwise, 100 or 120 years after you are dead, nobody remembers you except very few people. If you are in politics, or made a great invention; for example Gowon will always be mentioned in Nigerian history because of the civil war. In intellectual circles, Soyinka will always be remembered as long as there is something called the Nobel Prize and he has a lot of plays through which he will be remembered. Obasanjo may never be remembered after 50 years because history may not be as kind to him as it could have been if he hadn't come back as head of state the second time because the fact that he handed over to a civilian government may not be considered important then. It may be important now but in 50 years time, no one will be talking about 'whether military handed over' or not. It's an insignificant phase. Chinua Achebe will be remembered, perhaps, less than Soyinka unless he wins the Noble Prize or something equivalent. I don't know of any other Nigerian that will be remembered in a 100 years time beyond his immediate friends or families or those who may come across their works. Really, once you are gone, you are gone my friend!

THE NEW KOGI STATE



In the ever-changing landscape of governance, the ability to seamlessly transition from one administration to the next is crucial for the continuity of progress. In the case of Kogi State, Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo has exemplified this through his strategic approach to strengthening the legacy of his predecessor, former Governor Yahaya Bello.

Through a comprehensive plan that focuses on infrastructure development, healthcare services, education and youth empowerment, agriculture and rural development, attracting investments, promoting economic growth, and improving governance and public service delivery, Governor Ododo has mapped out consolidation strategies across all sectors.

His predecessor's tenure was marked by significant achievements in various sectors. His visionary leadership led to the development of key infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges, and public buildings, which have greatly improved connectivity and accessibility across the state. Additionally, his emphasis on healthcare services resulted in the establishment of state-of-the-art hospitals and clinics, providing quality healthcare to the people of Kogi.

Moreover, Gov Bello's focus on education and youth empowerment led to the construction of modern schools and the implementation of programs to enhance the skills and opportunities available to the youth. These accomplishments form the foundation upon which Governor Ododo is building to take Kogi to new heights.

The massive infrastructural and other life-changing projects across all critical sectors have redefined governance in the state, coupled with the recognition of Kogi State as a frontline state in the areas of transparency and accountability.

Governor Usman Ododo has hit the ground running, to build on these achievements and deliver even more dividends of democracy to the good people of Kogi State.

Construction of Ganaja Junction Flyover, Lokoja



Construction and Renovation of A Specialist Hospital In Lokoja



Reconstruction and Asphalt Overlay of Natakò-Paparanda Square Dual-Carriage way



Construction of GYB Model Science Secondary School, Adankolo Lokoja



Construction of Civic Centre, Lokoja



Confluence University of Science and Technology,



T H E N E W K O G I S T A T E

Reference Hospital, Okene



Construction of Ohinoyi's Palace Okene



Ultra - Modern Clinic Complex, Prince Abubakar Audu Univerty Teaching Hospital, Anyigba



Revenue House



Construction of GYB Model Science Secondary School, Adankolo Lokoja

Other Projects

Inspection and Commissioning

Provision of Agricultural Machineries for Mechanized Farming

Confluence Rice, Ejiba, Yagba East LGA

PUNCH a marketplace of ideas that places great premium on character, competence, and innovation – *MD/EiC, Joseph*

In this interview with JUWE OLUWAFEMI, the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of PUNCH Newspapers Limited, Mr. Adeyeye Joseph, opens up on his transition from the newsroom to the boardroom and his plans for the company's continued growth and his agenda for his colleagues

What was the first thing that came to your mind following your appointment as the Managing Director/Editor-in-chief of the PUNCH Group?

Gratitude. Immense gratitude to God and gratitude to all the people who played significant roles in my career and life. I realised that though I had always worked very hard all my life, there was no way I could have arrived at that moment without God and the people who supported and believed in me. I was overwhelmed with gratitude so much that I penned a few appreciative lines to my significant other Deola, thanked my first editor Mr Eniola Bello, the person who facilitated my first journalism job Mr Victor Ifijeh, my predecessor, who poached me from Thisday and has been a bulwark of support ever since, our emeritus MD, Mr Ademola Osinubi, my big Oga Simon Kolawole, Mr Azubuikwe Ishiekwe, who I fondly refer to as editor emeritus and others who contributed in

diverse forms to my rise in the profession. That done, I was overwhelmed by an acute sense of responsibility and a keen awareness of the burden of expectations that I would have to bear going forward. The thought that the buck would now stop on my table and my decisions, and the decisions that I may have to implement at the behest of the board, could make or mar the company sobered me and brought home the magnitude of the task ahead of me.

What was the transition like from the newsroom to the boardroom?

I would say

tough but seamless. My first newsroom was Thisday's, and it was there that I started my journey as a lowly reporter. I remember my days as a reporter with great fondness, though it was rough, and life was hard for me and my family. Nevertheless, THISDAY was a great place to work because it was constantly brimming with creative energy, and some of the longest-lasting and truest relationships that I greatly cherish were formed in the crucible of that testing experience. I like to analogise my experience using computer terms: what people get to see when they look at a computer is the simplified and pretty front end. What they do not see is the messy maze of wires and complex algorithms that keep the computer's interface pretty and inviting. I have always striven to ensure that I have a personal work ethic that is more demanding and more exerting than that of any organisation that I work for. If I travel to work on a story, I'll ensure that I return with three stories. If I am tasked with editing a page, I'll try to edit a dozen. As for my elevation to the PUNCH board, it was seamless. The requirements for success in PUNCH are well known, and they flow directly from the top, the board. The PUNCH board is cosmopolitan, engaged, and broadminded. It is a marketplace of ideas that places a great premium on integrity, character, competence, logic, and innovation. So, any executive or anyone elevated to the board with such attributes, in sufficient quantities, is unlikely to have an issue with the board. So, I had none.

In your estimation, what exactly is PUNCH's staying power and winning formula?

PUNCH's staying power and winning formula are embedded in its corporate DNA, which I would describe as a set of corporate governance rules and ethical values developed over the years, by the board and management and infused with life by a staff body that's mostly lived their professional lives by those values. More than most, PUNCH has been quite lucky, for the better part of the last five decades, to have a majority of highly resourceful and innovative management, brilliant and deeply committed staff and a forward-looking and forward-thinking board. I am often quick to say that the successes that have come to be associated with PUNCH resulted from the tireless and relentless efforts of successive generations of staff who invested their prime to build a truly enviable institution.

Please share with us some of your most pleasant experiences working with PUNCH

My net experience has been pleasant and rewarding. I have had good times and bad times, highs and lows, ups and downs. But the positive aspects of my experience outweigh the negatives. I have been privileged to work in all of PUNCH titles. Although my time in Sunday PUNCH was very brief. I became a line editor and editor at a relatively young age. However, I was lucky to have superiors who had strong faith in my abilities and character. They gave me the latitude to channel my creative energies to very productive ends. I also enjoyed a very warm, cordial and almost filial relationship with my boss, Mr Osinubi, so much that, in the latter part of our stay in PUNCH, my colleagues had the mistaken belief that we always agreed on all issues. The truth is that we don't. However, we

THE PUNCH BOARD IS COSMOPOLITAN, ENGAGED, AND BROADMINDED. IT IS A MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS THAT PLACES A GREAT PREMIUM ON INTEGRITY, CHARACTER, COMPETENCE, LOGIC, AND INNOVATION. SO, ANY EXECUTIVE OR ANYONE ELEVATED TO THE BOARD WITH SUCH ATTRIBUTES, IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES, IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE AN ISSUE WITH THE BOARD. SO, I HAD NONE



agree on most issues. I have also had the privilege of working with some of the industry's most dedicated, diligent, and brilliant colleagues, such as the general managers and managers and the staff.

Do you mind walking us through your journey into the PUNCH Group?

I joined PUNCH in 2005 from THISDAY. It all started in 2003, I think when I got a call from a former editor of Saturday PUNCH, Mr Kayode Olawuyi, who invited me over for a chat and asked me to join Saturday PUNCH. A few days before his call, I had run into a former PUNCHER, Taiwo Rasak, at an assignment in Ajuwon. We were both in the town for a story on a lady who had sextuplets. So, Taiwo told me that the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief, Mr Ademola Oshinubi, read one of my stories, liked it, instructed Mr Olawuyi to share it with their desk (Saturday PUNCH) and invited me to work for PUNCH. I came around, took the test, and passed, but, for personal reasons, I thought better off not joining PUNCH at the time. Then again, in 2005, Mr Oshinubi read another story, liked it, and instructed a former editor of The PUNCH, Mr Azubuikwe Ishiekwene, to invite me to work for PUNCH. So, I joined in 2005 as a chief correspondent in The PUNCH.

Has journalism always been your dream job?

Maybe not journalism per se, but I love to write. In secondary school class two, I wrote an unpublished novel – Adventures in the City. I have always had a crusading, activist bent. I hate injustice. In secondary school, I was part of a small group that initiated a guerrilla publication that focused on ills. I was the lead rebel and writer, but we thought my writing might give us out. So, my friend suggested we outsource it to his cousin (Ropo Ewenla). We did and pasted our publications on the school noticeboard in the wee hours of the morning, and it caused a small stir. So, in retrospect, no other profession, except law, might have provided an outlet for my interests and passion – but then I was a science student in secondary school, so, journalism didn't cross my mind.

What would you describe as your greatest challenge so far in the course of duty?

As MD, managing people. I like to plan long, think broadly and deeply about problems and envisage, and preempt issues before they arise. Oftentimes, plans and projections get derailed, not because of the economy or weather, but because we, humans, are quite complex machines. The greatest and most critical resource in management in my view is the human resource. It is also the most and least reliable. I have discovered that managing people and expectations, as a means to attaining corporate objectives, is one of the toughest challenges ever. I used to enjoy playing blindfold chess for fun in the university, but managing people is such a complex endeavour that sometimes I feel it is tougher than playing blindfold chess.

Each time you see the vendors flaunt copies of PUNCH Newspapers, what comes to your mind?

I feel a sense of fulfilment. Our leadership of the print genre has never been in doubt in the last two decades, although our industry has no audit bureau of circulation, it is widely known and accepted that PUNCH is Nigeria's highest-selling newspaper. However, no newspaper manager can talk about these things without referring to the challenges that print newspapers are facing, a decline in the population of Nigerians who read print newspapers and the migration of readers and revenue online. So, nowadays, what gives a more permanent fulfilment is our leadership in digital and the metrics that validate that leadership plus the growing base of PUNCH's following on social and other alternative media. I am very passionate about social justice. So, I also feel fulfilled when our journalism remedies social, economic, or political inequities. Injustice makes my blood boil. I find the greatest fulfilment whenever our stories, editorials, and campaigns bring about change in the four broad areas of social justice: human rights, participation, equity, and access.

What has kept you in the PUNCH this long?

A congruence between my personal philosophies as they relate to the ideals of excellence and ethics and the corporate ideals that drive PUNCH. That connection is what has kept me in PUNCH up till now. As a Christian, the bible enjoins me to do my (secular) work as if I am working for God. It also enjoins us to do so whether our employers are deserving or undeserving. This is a principle that I hold dearly: it kept me going when I worked for a company that owed salaries for months. Of course, if an employer is undeserving, it is within an employee's right to choose to leave, but a heightened sense of stubborn positivity in difficult circumstances helps a great deal. PUNCH is also a newspaper where managers enjoy a very wide, not limitless, latitude to do their jobs without significant undue interference from the business side or the board.

What management style do you deploy and have aided the continued growth of the group under your watch?

First, I believe that human resources are the greatest and most valuable assets in any organisation. I prefer the open management style where transparency, inclusivity, and community are used to build a relationship of trust and agency between the leader and the led in ways that create values for all stakeholders in an organisation. With open

THE COMPANY'S STAFF ARE ITS GREATEST ASSET. WHAT WE NEED TO DO GOING FORWARD IS TO RESPOND TO THE CHANGING TIMES BY CONSTANTLY REINVENTING OUR COMPANY



• Adeyeye

leadership, it becomes easier to get staff to buy into the organisation's strategic goals and work as a team towards achieving them. We have invested considerable time and efforts to transfer this leadership ethos companywide, and we have had mixed results. Our biannual village meetings, feedback sessions, and leadership meetings are helping to change our corporate culture from the ground up, slowly but steadily. Second, I believe that companies thrive when decisions are based on logic and data and not sentiment. So, I am a firm believer in ideating and making informed decisions. In PUNCH, I encourage debate, and I also encourage leaders to be confident and accessible. I have found this approach to leadership quite useful in dealing with younger colleagues in the Gen Z generational group as their number increase in our workforce and their energies and irreverence create unique sets of HR issues with serious implications for the workplace. Lastly, I believe leadership should be as quick to offer rewards as it is to impose consequences. Be kind and fair but firm. I believe that true leadership is strong leadership, especially in trying times, and when difficult decisions that may inflict pain or discomfort have to be made, then a leader should.

As we mark the Golden Anniversary of PUNCH Newspapers, what should the staff under your care look forward to?

In the last five years or so, PUNCH's board and management have taken deliberate, intentional steps towards rebranding our image and creating a corporate atmosphere and reputation that attract, retain, and nurture talent. Ceteris paribus, this agenda will be furthered in the years ahead. Some of the initiatives simply reinforced the strong reward recognition culture that PUNCH is widely acknowledged for in the industry. Others sought to reframe the human resources frameworks and structures to reflect the best of modern HR practices. In the last 20 years or more, PUNCH has consistently paid staff salaries on the 26th of every month, insured its staff, paid the highest salaries in the media industry, encouraged and supported further studies etc. We also have a reputation for equipping PUNCHERS with the resources that'll aid them in getting the best results. PUNCH was the first media organisation to equip its journalists with laptops and digital cameras decades ago, and at some point, our staff of the year were rewarded with brand-new cars.

We have also sustained the tradition of prioritising training and retraining as vehicles for the continuous reinvention of staff and the company. The annual PUNCH Immersion Programme and PUNCH Refresher Programme are mainstays of our training efforts while the PUNCH Editorial Graduate Employment Scheme (PEGES) has been utilised to attract the best journalistic talent to PUNCH. So, we have a reputation and heritage to protect and project, and our Golden Decade will see us building on these initiatives and the ones introduced recently, such as the staff education support grants. We also have quite a few interesting, futuristic digital projects that are certain to provide staff with striking opportunities for growth.

What was growing up like for you?

I had a relatively poor but privileged childhood. Poor in the sense that my family just managed to get by. My mother was a teacher and my dad was a salesman. So materially, our life was a repetitive cycle of ups and downs. But I also consider it a life of privilege because I got an early introduction to reading books. My dad and mum, my mum especially, had a small collection of books. My siblings and I, by a variety of means, also got novels, history books, war novels, classics, newspapers and magazines from friends and neighbours. Books offered my siblings and me an escape from the relative deprivation around us. And for me, books were magical because they served as a means of imaginative travel and escape from my surroundings. Without the books that I read in those formative years, I probably wouldn't be where I am today and not able to interpret situations through the insight that knowledge and experience offer.

PUNCH STORY

AN IMPACTFUL JOURNEY OF 18,250 DAYS

JANET OGUNDEPO, VICTOR AYENI, GBENGA OLONIRAN and DARE OLAWIN write on The PUNCH'S journey of the first 18,250 days, and its plans to consolidate on its growth for the next 50 years

In the beginning...

In 1970, about a decade after Nigeria got her independence from the British in 1960, young and upwardly mobile people were also gaining an independence of sorts from media platforms which were not telling the kind of stories they wanted to read.

A company, PUNCH Nigeria Limited, was registered on August 8, 1970, under the Companies Act of 1968 to engage in the business of publishing newspapers, magazines and other periodicals. That nascent organisation would later grow to become one of the most iconic publications in the country's media landscape.

The company was co-founded by James Aboderin, an accountant, who doubled as the Chairman; and his partner— the celebrated journalist and editor, Sam Amuka-Pemu, who was the Managing Director.

About a year after its registration, the company presented its first offering to the public— a glossy, family-oriented magazine called Happy Home, and which was edited by Bunmi Sofola.

On March 18, 1973, the company's first weekly publication— *Sunday PUNCH*— hit the newsstands with a bang. It offered a breath of fresh air, which many had been anticipating for a long time.

Helmed by the first editor, Ajibade Fashina-Thomas, the paper had an eye-catching appeal that was targeted at the educated middle-class, the youth, and lovers of good journalism in general. It prided itself as 'Nigeria's exciting weekly newspaper', that was 'designed to give our country a unique Sunday paper which combines the best in serious and popular journalism'.

Indeed, over the years, the paper has lived up to that billing and has assumed a pride of place in Nigeria's journalism landscape.



Currently the second oldest surviving and most widely read newspaper in the country, the paper has gone through several evolutions and has emerged even stronger. The only surviving newspaper in the country older than The PUNCH is the Nigerian Tribune, which was established on November 16, 1942.

Initially, the paper had more of a lifestyle bent, and this was best exemplified by the picture of scantily clad female models that were usually splashed on its covers. The first edition had the picture of a half-dressed lady, and accompanied by the caption, "I'm Cherry: You may take me home". Indeed, the alluring cover worked magic as many did not hesitate to buy the paper and take it home.

Three years after Sunday PUNCH had been holding sway in the market, the daily newspaper— The PUNCH— was introduced on November 1, 1976, with Dayo Wright as its first editor.

With a copy sold for 10kobo, the paper wasted no time in competing with older and more established titles that were already dominating the market at that time.

Advertised as 'the lively paper for lively minds', its mandate included addressing the shortcomings and inadequacies of the established Nigerian newspapers of that era.

It was a calculated risk for the founders as the established newspapers had a lock on readership and advertisement patronage. And, on the other hand, the country was under military rule at the time, and as is well known, the men in uniform had little patience with what they considered the nosy media, which subjected them to intense scrutiny as it should be.

Undeterred, Aboderin and Amuka-Pemu saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate their managerial dexterity.

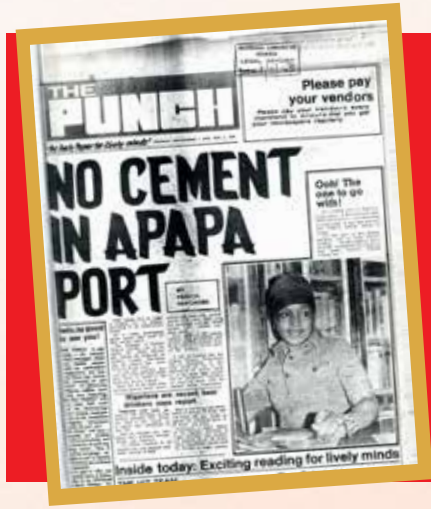
Beyond being just a businessman, Aboderin, a chartered accountant, banker, philanthropist, arts and sports patron, was passionate about the press, Nigeria and humanity. Along with Amuka-Pemu and other partners, they positioned PUNCH as an independent, objective medium, strong on news, but one committed to social justice, democracy, free enterprise and good governance.

Until his untimely demise in 1984, Aboderin remained committed to the radical transformation of the country through administrative arrangements reflecting its natural federal contours.

The daily paper

In a bid to favour a friendlier apolitical approach to news reporting, and combining coverage of social events with everyday political news, the daily newspaper began to report on things that the people really wanted to read. It consistently addressed issues that were pertinent to the common man, and it was no surprise that within a short time, the paper could scarcely be ignored, even by the big players of that time.

Within a short period, other print media outlets started to lose readers to The PUNCH. What gave the daily newspaper its cutting edge was its coverage of news as it happened, its human-angle stories that others were reluctant to cover or played down for fear of upsetting the military, and its bold and incisive editorial commentaries.



Military onslaught

Soon, national and state military rulers, whose trademarks had been their anger against journalists who critically examined their rule and constantly demanded accountability from their regimes, bared their fangs and came down hard on the paper.

After a military coup attempt in April 1990, the company was closed for a month, and Chris Mammah, the paper's deputy editor at the time, was imprisoned for 54 days.

In an interview with a national paper, the then Chairman of company, Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, described the period as hellish.

He said, "That was hell, because we had just started creeping out of the hole and then there was a closure. If they had known that keeping The PUNCH closed for another month would be the end of the organisation, they would have done that, because I am sure they wanted to kill us.

"There were rumours that some people in government wanted to buy The PUNCH, and I then revived it. Somebody told me that some people high in government would like to buy The PUNCH and I said, 'no', that we would revive it ourselves."

Once more, as a result of the political unrest that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections, the military issued Decree No. 48 of 1993 in July 1993, which outlawed the publication and distribution of any PUNCH titles throughout the nation.

The military junta also outlawed all PUNCH titles in July 1994, including TOPLIFE, a glossy monthly magazine that had been resurrected as a weekly. This was the last proscription of the newspaper. The daily editor at the time, Bola Bolawole, spent three days in detention in his office at the company's old headquarters in Mangoro, Lagos.

The government disregarded a court order that the company had obtained, directing it to unseal

the premises and pay N25m and N100,000 to the organisation and Bolawole, respectively. However, the government did not de-proscribe the paper until October 1, 1995, when the then-military head of state, the late Gen Sani Abacha did so via an Independence Day broadcast.

Through his ingenuity, Ogunshola, now the Emeritus Chairman, kept the company afloat amidst those storms and led the team that repositioned the PUNCH and enabled it to attain its position as the most successful newspaper in the country.

"We performed no magic to revive PUNCH. All we did was to work hard," Ogunshola said in an interview.

"Perhaps, my singular contribution was to insist and ensure that we got as much information as possible about the working of the system before we took any decision," he added.

Since the country's transition to democracy in 1999, the newspaper's publications have been constantly rebranded, from the early breezy style at its inception to hard-nosed news, features and analysis; strong on politics, economy, business, crime, sports, and entertainment.

With the array of quality and exclusive content it publishes daily, it is no wonder that The PUNCH is trusted by the general public, and is the go-to site for objective, factual reporting across print and online platforms.

From the founding chairman, Olu Aboderin; the second chairman and a former Western Region minister, the late Chief Moyosore Aboderin; Chief Ogunshola (fourth chairman), the late Wale Aboderin (fifth chairman), along with board members, including, until his passing in January 2020, the then longest-serving director, the eminent agronomist, Dr Lekan Are; and an accomplished finance professional, Ms Lola (Ibi) Aboderin, the board has provided exemplary leadership and guidance over the years.

A quintessential professional, Mr Ademola Osinubi, who joined the company as a reporter, spent 45 years in PUNCH, rising to every senior editorial management post and retiring as Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief in 2022. He helped pilot the company through its most turbulent period.

The board and management remain steadfast in adhering to the dreams of its founding fathers.

From Mangoro to Magboro

With the similarity in names being poetic but coincidental, the company moved its headquarters from Mangoro in Ikeja, Lagos; to Magboro, Ogun State.

The new company premises was formally declared open in a grand ceremony on June 29, 2010.

Aside from its contributions to the media landscape, and diligence in speaking truth to power, the company has also improved the economic fortunes of many, by providing employment for thousands persons across the country over the years.

At the last count, the media house is home to about hundreds of dedicated and committed employees.

Unlike what happens in a large section of the industry, one of the PUNCH's hallmark is its prompt and regular payment of salaries, allowances and bonuses to every staff member as at when due.

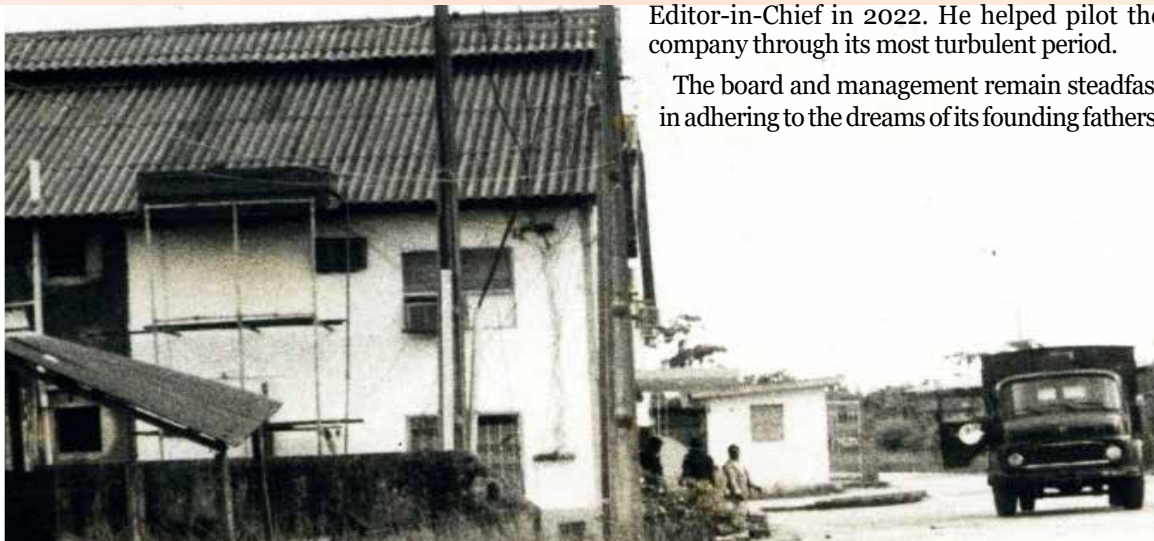


Punch-volution: From the ancestors to the Gen-Zs

Although Punch is 50 years old, it is still as dynamic as ever, constantly anticipating the trajectory of the media business, and aligning itself appropriately.

In order to keep up with different evolutionary trends, the newspaper has had to modify its operations to match existing realities.

Many years ago, the company became one of the first media houses in Nigeria to transition from a solely traditional printed newspaper, to a hybrid of both a printed paper, and a vibrant digital platform— www.



punchng.com.

Just at the time when the Internet and social media platforms were gaining grounds, the company wasted no time in jumping on the fast moving digital train, and expanding its reach from just within the country to all the continents of the world. The company was one of the earliest legacy publishers to launch a website.

As of the time of filing this report, the company's X (formerly Twitter) account boasts 6.5 million followers; while on Facebook, it constantly engages its 4.4 million followers; as well as 1.2 million followers on Instagram.

In January 2020, PUNCH Healthwise— an online health desk commissioned by the PUNCH Media Foundation with funding support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation— was launched, and it has driven a reliable and impact-driven media health centre.

Just a year into its existence, the initiative won the Impact Africa Summit 2021 award for excellence in health promotion journalism.

The company's current structure accommodates different offshoots, including the daily title known as The PUNCH, the weekend titles of Saturday and Sunday PUNCH, PUNCH Sports Extra, and Punch Online, which comprises the online editorial team, video/multimedia team, social media team, data analysts and the tech team.

The company's style of being ahead of trends and even creating them in fulfillment of its constitutional guaranteed agenda setting role is evident in the quality of its workforce. It is intentionally strategic and forward-looking. A cursory observation of the company's staff shows an eclectic range of individuals. Just as there are old and experienced hands in the system, there are also young journalists, including those fresh from tertiary institutions. On the company's payroll are members of Generation Z, Generation X and the Millennial, among other generations, all different in their unique ways, but coming together to function as a single and cohesive whole.

This mix has availed the company of a wide range of experiences, skills, knowledge, strength, and vibrancy.

Those who are older and have been in the system for longer are jokingly referred to as 'ancestors', while the younger ones are referred to as 'Gen Z'.

Staying ahead of the competition



Success is relative, and is perceived as different things by different people. For PUNCHERS, the message is simple: you must outthink your competitors, and make sure that your paper on the newsstands is better than the others.

Despite been the most successful newspaper house in the country, the company has never been complacent or try to rest on its oars. Rather, it is constantly looking for ways to give readers a more enriching experience.

Just like with every other venture, there have been several ups and downs, but the company, through the hard-work of its board and staff, has managed to weather the many storms quite remarkably.

A culture of excellence

Unarguably some of the greatest factors that have aided the company's growth are its knack for excellence, and intolerance for sloppiness. The hard work this demands has resulted in several awards it has won over the years, as well as the impact of many stories, which have ultimately caused policy changes in both the government and private sectors.

As far back as 1998, the newspaper had started winning the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence for Editorial writing; and for the next 12 years, it continued to win



the much-coveted prize.

In 2011, PUNCH won the Newspaper of the Decade awards by both DAME, and the Nigeria Media Merit Awards.

During the formal opening of the company's headquarters in Ogun State, the Emeritus Chairman, Chief Ogunshola, had reiterated the company's commitment to a free and vibrant press. He said, "PUNCH Newspapers will continue to push for the passage of a true Freedom of Information Bill as a major armour in the fight against corruption. It is clear that the present National Assembly is not interested in such things, for reasons that we all know."

Perhaps, as a testimony to the company's influence, a few days shy of a year after Chief Ogunshola made that statement, the FOIA was signed into law in 2011 by former President Goodluck Jonathan.

Cheers to the next 50 years

There is no gainsaying the fact that the past 50 years of The PUNCH's existence have been full of ups and downs, but with the organisation becoming even stronger after every challenge.

In its first 50 years of existence, it had to contend with ruthless military despots, who were hell bent on silencing the media. But, even though the country is nowhere close to where it should be, it is heartwarming that the nation has enjoyed over 24 years of uninterrupted democratic rule. While some people might take this for granted, there is no doubt that the country's vibrant media, with The PUNCH titles leading the charge in the print and online sections, have kept the country's ruling class on toes by constantly beaming a searchlight on their activities.

However, it is also apparent that as the company embarks on the journey of its next 50 years, it will have to navigate it with a different system, tools and structure than it used in the first 50 years.

With the rapid and dizzying rate at which new technologies emerge these days, keeping up with the trends is non-negotiable for an organisation that wants to survive; talk more of one that wishes to thrive.

At the time when the paper came into existence, there were no mobile phones or even Internet; and journalists had to rely on analogue systems and processes to do their jobs.

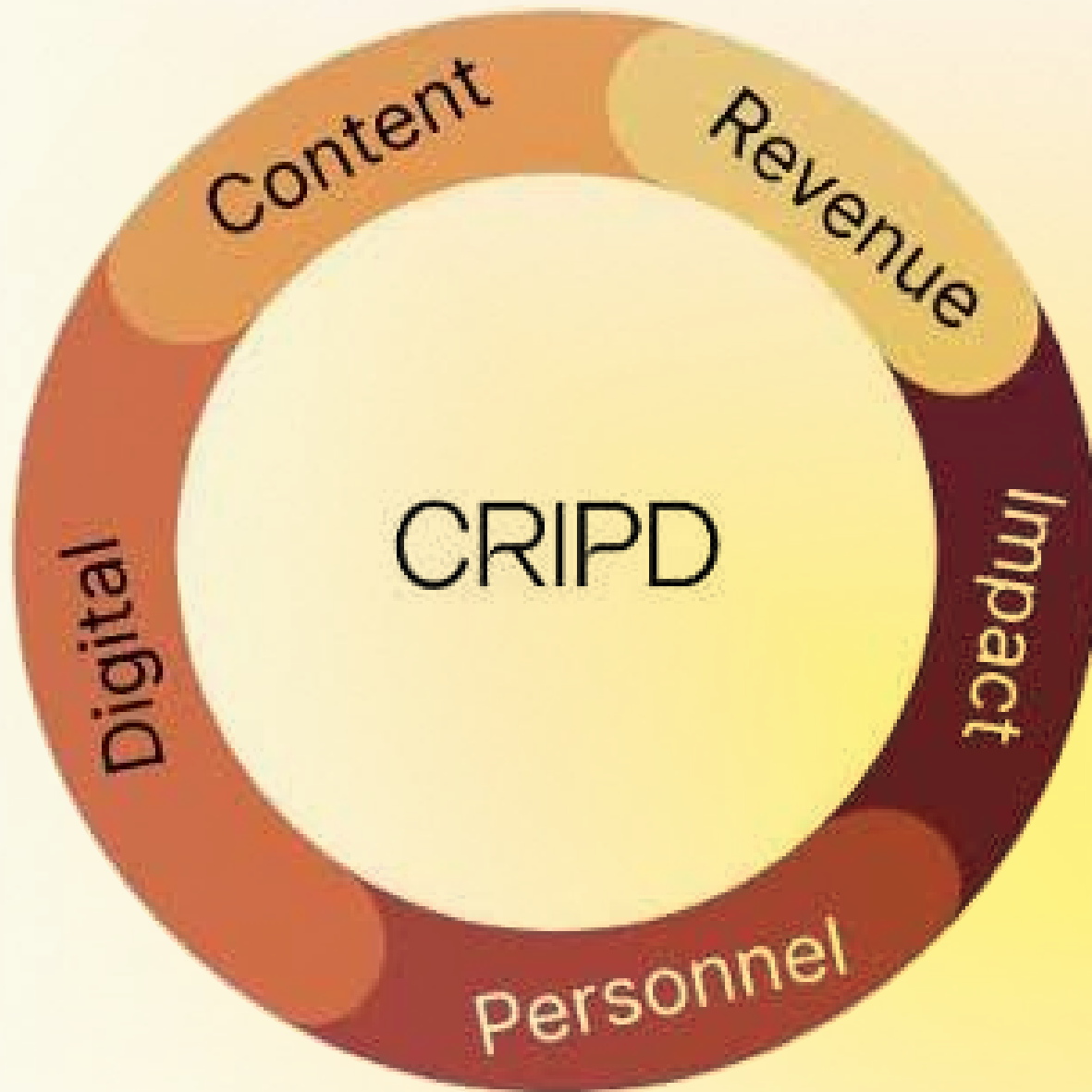
But these days, the modern journalist has an array of technological tools to help them do their jobs better. However, the proliferation of these tools also means that they are available to many people. Thus, it seems that with just a smartphone and Internet connectivity, everybody is basically a journalist these days.

However, in as much as tools and systems might change, the paper has consistently stated that it remains loyal to its core values, such as truth, accountability, objectivity, accuracy, fairness and integrity.

It has also signified that it has no intention of letting up on the fight against corruption and injustice. PUNCH seems to be on a renewed drive to use its platform to right wrongs, curb social vices, expose scandals, and keep the people informed.

As one of the most visited news websites in Nigeria, the media organisation does not hide its desire to be one of the biggest and most trusted media brands in Africa. The next 50 years will allow it to achieve that dream and break even new boundaries.





CRIPD AGENDA

To navigate the next phase of its existence, the paper has evolved a strategy called the CRIPD Agenda (Content, Revenue, Impact, Personnel and Digital). This aligns with the organisation’s corporate strategy to position itself as Africa’s preeminent content creation hub.

Content

To emerge as Africa’s preeminent content creation hub through the creation and distribution of outstanding, exclusive, impactful media content.

Revenue

To generate exponential forex revenues through the creation of capacities and systems that generate the highest values and returns for all stakeholders.

Impact

To sustain PUNCH’s heritage of ethical, credible, independent, pro-people, and impactful journalism.

Personnel

To create and foster human resource practices that attract and retain the best media and non-media talents that Nigeria and Africa have to offer.

Digital

To become Nigeria’s and Africa’s premier digital media brand in audience, revenue, and influence.

“ Our mission is to elevate the media landscape through the creation and distribution of outstanding, exclusive, and impactful content. We are committed to driving exponential forex revenues while upholding the values TRIBE—Truth, Reliability, Independence, Balance and Excellence— that define PUNCH’s legacy of ethical, credible, independent, pro-people, and impactful journalism” – 2023 staff memo





I'm proud of how far we've come, sustained PUNCH's legacy – *Director, Tunde-Obe*

Mrs Wunmi Tunde-Obe is one bundle of energy and activities birthed into one. In this interview with JUWE OLUWAFEMI, she speaks as a Director – PUNCH Newspapers Limited – and her passion for creativity. The multi-dimensional entrepreneur and writer also opens up on her fond memories of her late father, the founder of PUNCH Newspapers Limited, Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin who passed on February 28, 1984

IT'S a collector's item.

Enjoy your read.

"... dad in a loud, tuneless chorus of the Spanish tune, 'Guantanamera' - never mind that we murdered the lyrics then - we were all just having great fun," she recalled.

It's 50 years of the existence of PUNCH Newspapers, and the titles are going stronger each new day. What in your estimation is the secret?

The secret lies within the theme of our 50th anniversary celebrations: 'pedigree, principles and promise.' A strong foundation has been laid by the founding chairman, my dad, Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin, who left a strong and lasting legacy for us to build on. That's the pedigree.

Over the years, we have been known for our integrity, balanced reportage, courage, doggedness, objectivity, credibility, professionalism, and our unflinching duty to keep our numerous readers at all level reliably informed at all times. That's principles!

Worthy of note is that PUNCH has a strictly no brown envelope policy, which, if flouted or contravened, could lead to unpleasant consequences for the offending reporter. As the saying goes: 'we are for everyone, and we are for no one.'

Also, we acknowledge that as the years go by, things are evolving, as are our numerous readers. So, first, we not only have to evolve with it, we are more than prepared to do so, and we are already doing so.

When PUNCH first started, it was just the newspapers in hardcopy form. Today, we are digital as well. Our news can be picked from the newsstands and vendors, or you could download our app, visit our website, or follow us on social media where we already have a large following.

We already have a futuristic roadmap that is going to launch us effectively into the start of the next 50 years, and this is part of what we will be revealing as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations. This is our promise.

Each time you see a copy of The PUNCH Newspapers on the newsstands, what readily comes to mind?

I'm really proud of how far we have come and how we have managed to sustain the PUNCH legacy after all these years. You know every time you see a vendor standing by your car window in the traffic with all the newspapers you will notice that The PUNCH is usually the paper they tend to put in front as we know how the vendors display their papers for intending buyers from the best sellers to the not so popular ones. Likewise, on the newsstands, The PUNCH would always get its pride of place. So yeah, it makes me very proud.

In the face of stiff competition in the print industry, where do you see the PUNCH titles in the next 10 years?

In the next 10 years, as I have said, I see The PUNCH maintaining its dominance over the competition as we are ever evolving with the times and our target audience. This is because as we strive to inform, so also, do we aim to educate. Knowledge is wealth, and knowledge is power. When we inform and educate



• *Tunde-Obe*

our readers, we contribute in our own small way to raising a knowledgeable society who can make smart decisions with regard to their own lives and their communities in general.

As a daughter of the illustrious late Chief James Olubunmi Aboderin, how well do you navigate your way in the corporate world?

Well, considering the fact that I'm not exactly new to the corporate world, having worked in the advertising firm – LTC/JWT as a full-time employee and freelancer for more than a total of 10 years at some point, I am pretty much at home here. In fact, I like it here. As an employee, I loved to watch my own fast-paced growth from an Assistant Executive to a Group Head in my department before I left to concentrate on raising my children whilst delving into full-time entertainment with my husband. Of course, this was easier at the time because I had become self-employed, and my time, very flexible. So, coming back into the corporate world, I had to play catch-up with a lot of courses and trainings because, as expected, things had evolved. As an innovative entrepreneur, I enjoy facing corporate challenges, especially in the boardroom. So, regardless of whose offspring I am, having been raised to remain humble in everything that I do, it was very easy for me to remain in paid employment for six years and merit accolade and every promotion that I got whilst I learned about being a follower, a leader and most of all, a team player.

Are you constantly under some pressure to live up to a certain standard?

If there's any pressure, then it's the pressure that I put myself through and no one else. I have certain standards and certain goals that I have set for myself generally, and the pressure is on me from me to achieve those goals in my lifetime regardless of what anyone else thinks. In a nutshell, I do me. Period!

What fond memories have you of your father, the founder of The PUNCH Group?

There are loads! Although I was only 14 years old when he passed, the memories are a lifetime's worth. I remember when every Sunday was swimming day at

Airport Hotel in Ikeja. I was about five or six years old, and with my late younger brother and immediate elder sister, he would take us to the airport hotel for swimming and snacks later on. And though we loved our time at the pool, the drive back home was way more fun with the three of us standing in the back seat holding on to the head rests in front and joining dad in a loud, tuneless chorus of the Spanish tune, 'Guantanamera' – never mind that we murdered the lyrics then - we were all just having great fun (laughs). Then, we would start screaming, 'Daddy, do magic!!!' And he would oblige us. He would simply take both hands off the steering wheel for a few seconds while the vehicle was at top speed, to our utmost delight. I could never forget those times.

Growing up, dad also taught us the need and the importance of a good education. As a lover of the arts and entertainment, he encouraged us to pursue our dreams in the arts if we so desired, but first, he said, 'get a degree. That way, you would always have something to fall back on when showbiz no longer pays the bills.' The very same things I say to my children today.

You are a woman of many parts. How do you cope as a Board member of The PUNCH Group alongside other competing responsibilities?

I would say I'm pretty good at multitasking, and thanks to technology and zoom. Things just got a lot easier. Also, since I joined the Board, I have learned to be a lot more organised and more intentional in everything I do. Punctuality, delegation, discipline, responsibility. These are things I no longer do frivolously and strive to perfect every day. So, having done my bit, I leave the rest to God my Helper to implement.

How was growing up like for you?

I miss those growing up years. They were very happy years with no worries or responsibilities, and everyone was still 'around'. Those were years devoid of kidnappings, very minimal crimes, affordable vacations abroad, the dollar exchange rate was \$1 to N1, the pound was £1 to N2 and Nigeria Airways was rated one of the best carriers in the world. I could go on, but I think you get my drift.

You seem to have a strong passion for the arts and entertainment industry. How did this evolve and the push?

It was through my father. Like I had earlier said, this was someone who loved and promoted the arts. He organised art exhibitions, fashion shows, concerts, and music competitions. He also had a record label initially called 'Skylark Records', which later became Lagos International Records. It was on this label that the late Christy Essien-Igbokwe's most popular album 'Ever Liked My Person' which contained the evergreen hit song, 'Seun Rere' was released in the early 80s. So, having grown up with so much music and creativity around us, we all fell in line so very easily as it were. So, you can see that the passion had been there right from my early childhood.

Where do you get such remarkable energy to juggle your responsibilities alongside being the dutiful wife, caring mother, and corporate lady?

For me, the most challenging years are over. The children are grown and independent, the youngest being 19. This means that I now have more time to indulge in a lot of self-love while pursuing my own dreams with the support of my husband and children. And then, with technology, a lot of things are easier to navigate, such as staying in touch with your loved ones via video calls and the like whilst you are away at work or out of town.

What words of advice would you share with children of famous achievers, such that the name they carry will stay without blemish, like you have with the Aboderin name?

Sit down and be humble. Be kind to others and never look down on anyone. You never know where and under what circumstances you will meet them later in life. As much as you can, always strive to work hard to make a name for yourself so that you may be respected in your own right and not seen as spoiled and entitled. Never get carried away by your name or status but endeavour to remain levelheaded and conscious of the legacy you need to protect. Always remember that a good name is better than riches and endeavour to impact a life positively whenever you can afford to. The more lives you touch, the more the heartfelt prayers from your beneficiaries would follow, surround, and protect you wherever you go. And most of all, fear God and always put Him first.

You have continued to inspire with T.W.O in spite of the slippery terrain. What's the secret to your survival and thriving at the top spirit?

God, passion, versatility, and staying true to ourselves. Knowing when to clamour for the top spot and knowing when to step aside for the next set while still catering to our diehard fans. And that's it.

GROWING UP, DAD ALSO TAUGHT US THE NEED AND THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD EDUCATION. AS A LOVER OF THE ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT, HE ENCOURAGED US TO PURSUE OUR DREAMS IN THE ARTS IF WE SO DESIRED, BUT FIRST, HE SAID, 'GET A DEGREE

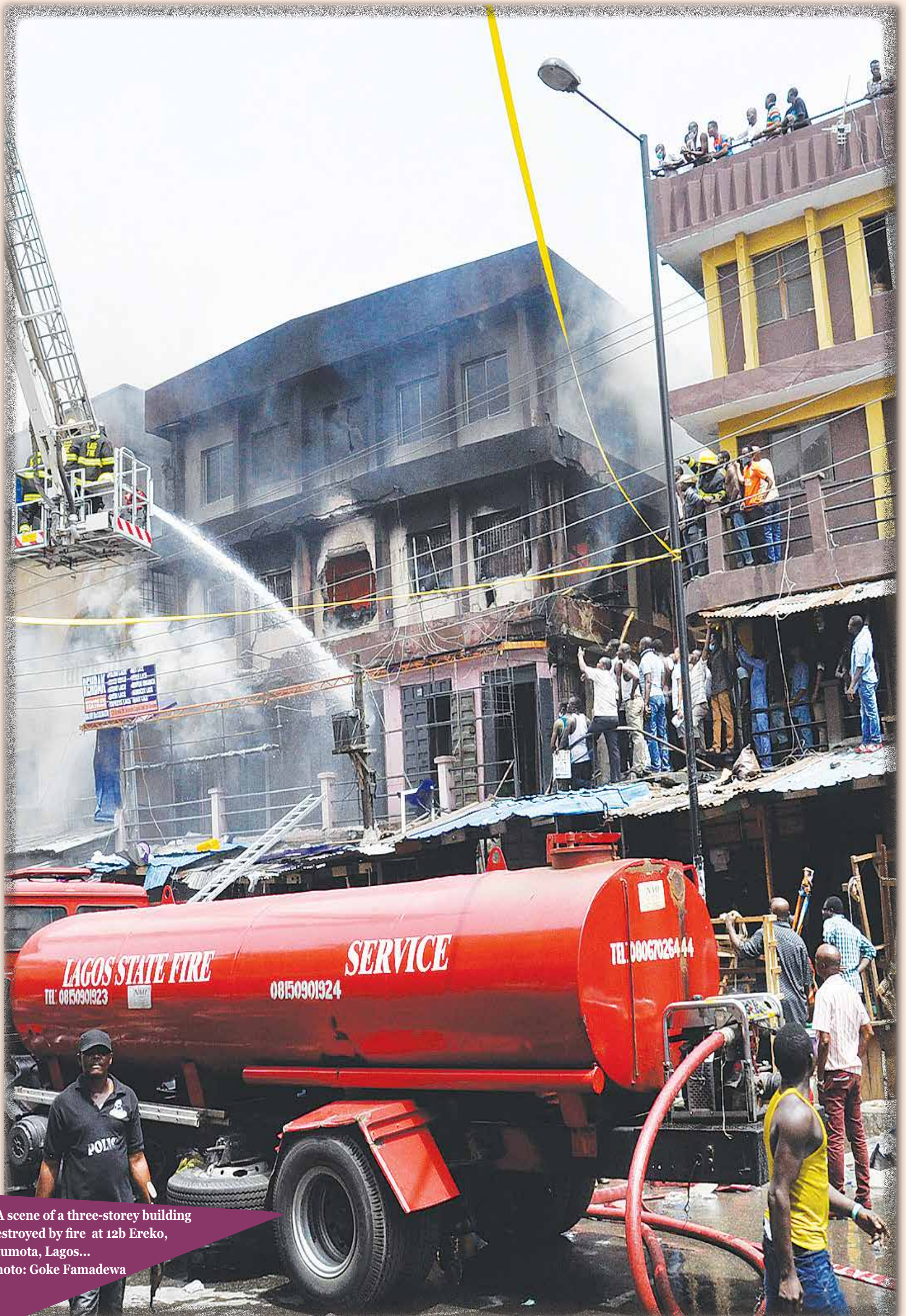
The PUNCH Newspapers at 50. Any regrets?

Most certainly, no regrets whatsoever. Every mistake along the way is a learning curve, and I believe that everything happens for a reason. I know that my father, were he alive today, would be most proud of how his legacy has been preserved thus far. As a matter of fact, I am told that in some institutions like LEAP Africa and Harvard Business School, The PUNCH is used now and again as a case study for thriving, successful family businesses. It doesn't get more gratifying than that.

What new things would you want to see in the paper and its workers?

In the paper, I would like to see stuff that engages the youth and encourages them to want to read more and know more. I would like to see articles that educate them whilst speaking their language as it were. I would like to see stories that help this new generation make informed and responsible decisions with regards to the kind of society they would like, not only to grow up in but raise their children in as well. With the workers, I would like to see continued dedication and passion for their job. It is a thing of pride and joy when a PUNCH staff can face new challenges and go out and excel in the outside world with the confidence and knowledge acquired during their time in our workspace.





• A scene of a three-storey building destroyed by fire at 12b Ereko, Idumota, Lagos...
Photo: Goke Famadewa

Empowering Lives is Our Enduring Passion



As a responsible Pan-African organization, our strategic decision to invest in Nigeria and Africa presents the opportunity for an economic transformation through industrial and manufacturing revolution in profound ways – Cement production, Transportation, Construction, Coal mining, Oil refinery & Petrochemicals, Steel, Salt refining, Sugar refining, Fertilizer, Telecommunications, Packaging, Automobile Truck assembly, Rice milling and Port operations



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PUNCH will sustain lead in print, digital beyond next decade – *Director, Aboderin-Talabi*

Olubunmi Aboderin-Talabi is a Director of the widest circulating English language newspaper in Nigeria, PUNCH. She is also an author; the founder of IweMi (formerly Clever Clogs Books); the convener of the Akada Children's Book Festival; a Member of the Board of Trustees of Women In Management, Business and Public Service; a Member of the Board of Trustees of Punch Media Foundation and the Chairperson of the Association of Children's Authors & Illustrators of Nigeria. In this interview with JUWE OLUWAFEMI, this lady who is passionate about creating visually engaging, culturally relevant content for children and has sustained her desire to see steadily increasing literacy rates within her community, shares her views on the growth of the PUNCH Group's brand and its driving spirit for excellence, alongside how her family's legacy has impacted greatly on her career path

HOW does it feel being associated with PUNCH and its outstanding legacy?

It's an immense privilege. PUNCH is a company that is not afraid to stand by the courage of its conviction. PUNCH has principles. PUNCH has standards, and we stand by those standards.

It's a company that is exemplary when it comes to a strong work ethic. Some of the best management minds have worked, and still work, at PUNCH, so it is absolutely a privilege to be associated with such professionals, with persons who have selflessly, sacrificially worked for the company for many, many years and I'm talking about staff, management and leadership. Therefore, it is an immense privilege to be associated with PUNCH and its outstanding legacy, which is very inspirational for me in my own professional journey. From time to time, I recall examples of leadership or budget management from PUNCH, and that inspires me and provides me with a template for moving forward.

Kindly share your experience with us since you joined PUNCH's Board as a Director?

I joined the board of the company in 1994, and this year would make it 30 years since I have been on the board. It's been a very defining learning experience in my professional life. Sometimes, it's been tough, as you know, with any board meeting, it can be particularly tough, but many times, it's been rewarding, and I'm grateful to all of my colleagues.

When I joined the board, it was during the time of a military dictatorship. The PUNCH titles were proscribed by the Abacha military government, and the newspaper had been locked out of its premises. Soldiers came and

NEWSPAPERS LIKE PUNCH PERFORM THE VITAL ROLE OF INFORMING THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND KEEPING PEOPLE ABREAST OF WHAT IS GOING ON INTERNATIONALLY, IN ADDITION TO KEEPING UP THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE

occupied the compound, and we couldn't operate from there. I remember that my initial board meeting had to hold off-site. I also recall my very first experience attending the board meeting with my sister, Mrs Emuwa, and when we were introduced to the other members. It was an intimidating experience. I remember Mr Demola Osinubi

was then the General Manager, and he was trying to encourage me, telling me to 'be strong'. He was saying, 'It's okay.' Today, it's good to see over the years the transitions, the growth, the level of camaraderie, how things have panned out. I started off as director and later joined the senior management team as an Executive Director, Business Development, and New Projects. I worked as an ED for seven years, and during that time, I also served as the pioneer Managing Director for PUNCH Commercial Printing. It was one of the most enjoyable work experiences. I learnt a lot and had a lot to contribute.

I've had the privilege of working with three of the five Chairmen: Chief Ogunshola and after him, my brother of blessed memory, Wale Aboderin, and now my sister Mrs Angela Emuwa. So yes, it's been interesting to see the different management styles from the different leaders, and each person has added their own unique touch, as can be expected, to the board and to the company. Each person making improvements and building on the legacy of their predecessor.

As a Director of PUNCH Newspapers Group, what does the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the newspaper mean to you?

A: It's a time of reflection. It's a time for gratitude. It's a time for connecting with key stakeholders and collectively being thankful for all that the newspaper and subsidiary companies have been able to achieve over the last 50 years.

It's a milestone that is a great legacy to uphold and perpetuate. It's an opportunity to think about the future as well and do what is necessary to ensure the continuation of the company for the next 50 years and the 50 years after that.

It means someone somewhere did something right, or someone somewhere is doing something right. In any environment, to have a business survive five decades is no mean feat, so I will say super well done to the leadership, the management, the staff. Over the last five decades, they have taken the company through various times and have still come out as one of the best national daily newspapers in the country.

What core values of PUNCH in your estimation have sustained the newspaper these 50 years of existence?

I would say it's the strong work ethic, selflessness, persistence, resilience, understanding what you stand for, and sticking by it. Yes, I would say it's a devotion and loyalty to the company and its leadership, but more than that, I would say it's also got to do with understanding the vital role that newspapers play in any society, especially in any democratic society and being insistent, and being fortunate enough to have editors and leaders in place who understand what it is to stand for the truth and to let people know what is going on and to keep people informed about things that affect them, their livelihoods, their families and so on. So, the core values that have sustained the paper in these



• Aboderin-Talabi

50 years is the determination to adhere to the truth, the drive to objectively report what is going on, and this insistence on checking things before going to press even if it means other people break the news before we do. We wait until we are sure of the story before we publish.

In addition, the family's stance on non interference with the editorial policy of the paper and giving the editorial team the independence to run the paper as it deems fit, and to decide on the content and so on. That also has helped to sustain the paper.

What fascinates you the most about the PUNCH titles?

It is always interesting to hear what PUNCH has to say about a particular issue. So when there's a national story or a story of general interest, I always look out for the PUNCH version. The insights, the opinions, the columnists, I'm always interested to read what it is that they think about issues. I don't always agree with what is published, and sometimes I have debates with various stakeholders about what has been published, but I respect their independence and yes I'm always fascinated to see what angle the paper is going to take on a matter because I myself I don't know what is going to be published until it is published.

I love the editorials, the cartoons, the photo news. You learn a lot from the use of photographs, which is why I'm a big fan of print over digital, even though digital is the way of the future, I still love the print because there is so much you'll learn from the photo news and it doesn't always come across on the digital platforms. A picture, like they say, is as good as a thousand words.

I like the way the newspaper is organised. I like the Metro section, I like the fact that there's an Arewa section that tells you what's going on in the North, and there's also a section that tells you what's going on in the South East and South South. I like Panorama because it goes in-depth into a story that may not necessarily be something that is front page news but is still very important, and it goes in-depth into that story.

I like the Healthwise section, the Business pages, and I like reading through the adverts. They fascinate me. You learn a lot reading the various adverts placed in the paper. Of course, the Business and Economy section, as well as the business extra, the Capital Market section, and then on the weekends, you have the Children's section, Sunday Spice and the Sunday Interviews.

There's also the Personal Finance, Sports and things like that. There's something for everyone. The Foodie pages are also really good too, you can get some great recipes there.

Young PUNCHers every Sunday makes the Sunday paper quite unique, so it's got something for the whole family.

Each time you see a copy of PUNCH Newspapers on the newsstands, what readily comes to mind?

PUNCH plays a vital role in the social, economic, political, and educational life of citizens.

Whenever I see the paper at a newsstand or with a vendor, I think of the great production and efforts that must have put in place to get the paper out.

However, we need more vendors and more newsstands to sell our titles. More people need to have access to newspapers because newspapers perform a vital role in society, and it seems nowadays the sales outlets are shrinking.

Newspapers like PUNCH perform the vital role of informing the general public and keeping people abreast of what is going on internationally, in addition to keeping up the level of public discourse to make sure that people have the facts they need to be able to make up their minds and be equipped with the right information to make sound decisions.

The paper is a repository of information historically, looking backwards as we are doing now... looking at the last 50 years, as well as appreciating the present and forecasting into the future.

The economic role of any business that has survived for more than 50 years can not be overstated, not the least because it's a job-creating

I ACTUALLY DON'T FEEL THE PRESSURE BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT I AM STRIVING TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF. I KNOW THAT WERE MY FATHER TO BE ALIVE, HE WOULD BE PROUD OF ME

• Aboderin-Talabi



industry. For each employee, there's maybe five or six dependants benefitting from the employment status of the PUNCH staff.

So, each time I see the newspaper on the news stands, I'm like ... Thank you, God. We're playing our part, informing the people, educating, connecting, and giving employment to the people.

In the face of the stiff competition in the print industry, where do you see the PUNCH titles in the next 10 years?

I actually see the PUNCH titles sustain the lead in the print and digital news space beyond the next 10 years. The PUNCH brand will become even more exciting with a robust reach and relevance as a print and digital platform alongside other aspects of the PUNCH brand that will soon be unveiled.

As a daughter to the founder of PUNCH Newspapers, are you constantly under some pressure to live up to a certain standard?

It is not unlikely that anyone with a beloved parent with such significant impact on the lives of many, or who had influence in a society would not feel that they have large shoes to fill, or legacy to maintain.

But I must be honest with you, I actually don't feel the pressure because I believe that I am striving to be the best version of myself. I know that were my father to be alive, he would be proud of me, as he would be proud of his other children. So, no, I don't feel any pressure to live up to any subjective standard. I believe in just being the best version of myself.

Do you mind walking us through your growing up years and the fond memories you have of Chief James Olu Aboderin, the founder of the PUNCH Group?

My fondest memory of my Dad was when he came to my school to visit me. It was a surprise visit. I was in Prep School in England at the time, and as busy as he was, he showed up. He just showed up. That is one of my fondest memory of him. Things like that mean a lot to children. You know, just having their parents show up and show an interest in their activities. That's my fondest memory of my Dad.

I also remember him chuckling. Even when he was ill in the hospital, he still had his sense of humour. I remember that about him. Maybe because I was young, he didn't show the things that he had been going through. I remember I didn't think that his sickness was something that would lead to his passing. I thought that he would get better because he always maintained that jovial attitude, but... it is well.

You are a woman of many parts. Share with us how you cope as a Board member of the PUNCH Group and other responsibilities.

How do I cope? I have a lot of help. I have a strong support system, a very supportive spouse, and a really good team. I am fortunate enough to work with a brilliant set of people for each board I'm on. The people there are hardworking and everybody carries their own weight, so that way the burden is not too much

on any one person. So, it's about having a strong support system and being fortunate enough to work with really good people.

You have a strong passion for creative writing and literature generally. How did this passion, which has won you awards, evolve?

Apparently, it's something that has been there all along, but it didn't get activated until I became a mother. When I became a mother and I wanted to read bedtime stories to my child, I found some bedtime stories, and I wanted to read African bedtime stories to her. I wanted stories that featured children that look like her, that featured environments like Lagos, and I found a few, but they're not that many. After a while, I had read all that we could find, and then I became acutely aware of the dearth of children's literature featuring black children or children of colour in general. It was one of the things that inspired me to start writing, and I just enjoyed it, and I've kept going ever since. Writing children's books led to the creation of the Akada Children's Book Festival, which has become a much loved, much anticipated, annual literary event for young readers. It's given rise to many other children's book writers, providing them with a platform for reaching their market. The festival is also an avenue for parents to discover new books and for children who love reading to have better access to books than before.

Aside from writing children's books series, what other aspect of writing catches your fancy?

I have written a number of articles in the areas of commerce, agriculture, resource maximisation, sanitation, and land use in Nigeria. Many of my articles have been published in several national daily newspapers, such as PUNCH, BusinessDay, The Guardian, Nation, Vanguard, New Telegraph, Sun, This Day, and others.

My passion for writing further developed into collaborating with talented artists to create beautifully illustrated children's picture books designed to make reading attractive, inspire innovation, and excite children, parents, and teachers.

Some of my published works include: Tobi Visits the Conservatory; Kob the Antelope; Diary of a Toddler; Tobi Bakes A Cake; Tobi Learns To Swim; Tobi And The Kid's Marathon; Tobi At The Art Gallery; On The Water; Mummy, Can I ... ? and Why Do You Wash Your Hands?

I have had the privilege to read my books and give keynote speeches at numerous conferences, schools, book clubs, and events in various parts of Nigeria and internationally.

Do you mind walking us through your academic background?

I have a BSc in Economics from City University London and I also did an MSc in Digital Marketing and Channel Management at the University of Surrey. I have an honorary doctorate in Media & Communication and I have completed the General Management Programme at Harvard Business School as well as the Advanced Management & Leadership Programme at Oxford University Said Business School.



• Almajiris feeding from the bare ground after a minor accident involving a tricycle and a food vendor at Liberty Junction, GRA, Gombe State.
Photo: Chima Azubuike

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From ground zero to golden fifty

By **Ademola Osinubi**



• Osinubi

TALKING ABOUT PERSONALITIES, THERE WAS THE SMART, GOOD-LOOKING AYODE AJAYI, OUR CHIEF CAMERAMAN. HE FITTED LIKE A GLOVE INTO THE IMAGE PUNCH SEEMED TO BE PROJECTING

Personality interview specialist and icon of the 'Face-to-Face' fame, one of the looked-forward-to features in the Sunday PUNCH menu in the seventies and eighties, Muyiwa Adetiba, proclaimed in an article on the fifth anniversary of Sunday PUNCH thus: 'We Have Come A Long Way'. He should know. He belonged in the beginning.

As I chatted with him last week on the subject of PUNCH's 50th anniversary, I noted his high-pitch excitement, the kind that emerged from a joyful heart. We shared and relived experiences as co-travellers in the PUNCH boat. *He, in particular, being one of the details of the very beginning.* I prodded him for more on the foundation staff, the journalists in particular. He obliged and referred me to this same article, published in the Sunday PUNCH edition of March 19, 1978, five clear years after the paper debuted, and 17 months after coming on stream of the daily version, The PUNCH. Yes, the very beginning. For, it is in the context of this beginning that this celebration is situated and can be best appreciated.

Persuaded that a story cannot be better told than in its original rendition and form, I have found it appropriate to lift the relevant parts of the article into this piece in restating the power of humble beginning, commitment, sacrifice and the dogged pursuit of excellence in the half-century journey of PUNCH. All of these, it would turn out, had been ingrained in the PUNCH DNA right from conception.

In Adetiba's words,

'Sunday PUNCH was a tottering kid. Just learning how to use its feet. We could all see that it had a lot of catching up to do, but with those first tentative steps of that baby, we knew we had a natural racer, a winner on our hands.'

And that realisation made us put a little extra effort into shaping up the destiny of a great champion.

The going was really tough then. It was an unspoken fact that when you got to work on Friday mornings, you really didn't hope to get home until Saturday morning. When we had to go the extra eight pages, the twenty-four-hour-a-day schedule started on Thursday. It got so tough one evening that I told my editor, 'There must be easier ways of making money.'

All he said was 'Yeah.' I guess he was too tired to say anymore.

My editor was Ajibade Fashina-Thomas now of the National Sports Commission. A veteran, Jabby (to his friends) was the man for this unique post. I owe a lot to him today.

Working with the skeleton staff he was compelled to work with then, most people would have given up out of sheer exasperation. But not Jabby, on Thursday, with no front or back page stories and the sports page staring blankly at us. Jabby would still walk in smartly dressed with a cigar in one hand, a briefcase in the other hand, and a smile on his lips.

Then he would sit down, push his pair of glasses up, and call for the week's file.

One, or two hours later, he would look up with a front-page story. The back page usually materialised from the telex machines.

Dayo Wright was the Sports Editor then, who had to double as a Sub-editor and Night editor.

Bunmi Sofola (now Fadase) was the Acting Editor for Happy Home Magazine. She also had to double as the Women's Editor

One person I really can't forget in the editorial line-up was A.B Attah Albert, who was a way out in everything, in his thinking, writing, and his behaviour. I still think he is one of the best writers I have read on the pages of a Nigerian newspaper.

As the youngest writer in the set-up, both age and experience, I sort of underscored for them all. I dabbled into Sports, Features, News and Interviews.

It was this little group, with Kenny Adamson, who came in on Wednesday from Yaba College of Technology to do his PUNCH Cartoon Comment and the News Reporters who made the editorial team.

The credit for the success of the Sunday PUNCH today does not lie on this small group of people alone.

On the sidelines were people like Prince Oduah, PUNCH's smartest dresser, who had to run around to ensure that we got our pay at the end of the month. I didn't envy the job of these people, who under Mr Akinwale had to sell a paper whose only marketability was its promising future.

It's funny it seems natural now that people should expect their paycheck these days anytime from the 23rd of the month. Five years ago, nobody expected anything until the 31st. Despite that, most people who were around then would still prefer the life, comradeship, and togetherness of a small group of dedicated workers to the large, complex, relatively easy life we now have

The history of the Sunday PUNCH would not be complete unless one mentions those who were at the beginning, like George Okoro. I didn't meet him at PUNCH. I met him a year later when he came to teach me sub-editing at the Nigerian Institute of Journalism. He is the finest layout wizard I have ever come across.

Apart from his genius in page planning, George Okoro had a kind of lifestyle that made him friends easily, for he never minded who shared a bottle of beer with him.

There was Muni, the slim petite girl who had a column about life at nineteen. There was Judi, airing her thoughts through 'Window on my mind'. Her explosive provocative articles shook the entire roots of femininity in the Nigerian Society and helped launch the Sunday PUNCH as something different.

Although I didn't meet all these people at PUNCH, I met them later on during the roaming, expansive life of a journalist. I found in them the only kind of people who could give a paper a different outlook. I also realised why they didn't stay so long. Nobody, including Sam Amuka, could keep such volatile personalities bottled together for a long time.

Talking about personalities, there was the smart, good-looking Ayode Ajayi, our Chief Cameraman. He fitted like a glove into the image PUNCH seemed to be projecting. An image of hardworking but independent and carefree people. He had a flaw through his temperament, and it was one thing you had to put a rein on at The PUNCH.

It was with these kind of people that PUNCH started from a piece of rag to the most different, most popular Sunday paper in the country today.

PUNCH has indeed come a long way.

The first sign of economic viability came when all those who were eligible had cars.

Today, PUNCH editorial staff are among the best-paid in Nigeria.

The past five years have come so fast that images of those years are now blurred in my mind. Funny, these things that filled me with sadness were not the kind irregular hours of work, the unpredictability of the job, or the low pay. My heart sank when A.B. Attah told me one afternoon, 'I'm checking out of this place', or a year later when Jibade Thomas told me in his house, 'I think I'm going to resign'.

Although I realised they were both going for higher pay, I couldn't help the low feeling. These were people whose advice and help I had cherished.

On the good side, my heart swelled on Sunday morning when Sunday PUNCH became the first Nigerian paper to carry full-colour advertisement.

These days when the PUNCH has become a household word, it's very easy to forget those days when you picked up the phone for an appointment and the voice on the other end of the receiver was cracked, is it a sort of magazine or something?

But progress was inevitable with the kind of leadership PUNCH had. Progress was what Sunday PUNCH had in leaps and bounds. These days, it is more with pride than anything else that I tell people 'You know, I don't know everybody in the editorial.'

But, everything else considered, the good life, the large capable staff, the pay still can't help reaching out nostalgically for that little group of people that helped make Sunday PUNCH the paper it is today and the easy, cordial atmosphere that made coming to work a pleasure.

That is one half of the story of the beginning. The other half, fairly well known and available in the marketplace, is the conception part, but not by any consideration, less important...the egg before the chicken stuff.

Two gentlemen, James Olubunmi Aboderin and Sam Oruru Amuka Pemu (Uncle Sam), accomplished accountants and journalists respectively, came together in a partnership to form a newspaper company to be known as PUNCH.

PUNCH? That was quite strange but unique, a departure of some sort from the usual in an era where, both in this part and the larger world, Times, Post, Express etc had become the generic names for newspapers.

How and why they settled for that name is not the issue. But of a certainty, that thought process and its philosophical underpinnings were prognostic and portentous. The word PUNCH, both in its noun and verb forms, is robbed in some aggression, hardly desired by anyone. No sane person dares an urchin who threatens a punch in the face, after all. This was irregular, different; a difference with some defiance to boot!

Bated breath.

Surprise

When the maiden edition of Sunday PUNCH rolled out of the press on March 18, 1973, it came with some missing parts. It carried neither punch nor poison as the name had suggested; it was different, yes, but in aesthetics and content. Soft. Appealing. Welcoming. And tempting. Its editors described it in charming epithets.

Swingly Elegant Refreshingly Different

The paper gave prominence and premium space to the lighter issues of life, entertainment in all shades, licentious photography that featured bursts and bums, horoscope, pools betting, love, sex and allied matters. And sports.

It was only in the columns authored by Sad Sam, Ayo Vex, A.B Attah, and a few others that you found some hard-knocking, pungent stuff.

The content of the Sunday PUNCH remained largely consistent in its softness, securely registered in the hearts and homes of its patrons, until the arrival of the daily edition, The PUNCH, on November 1, 1976.

At this time, Nigeria was in the belly of a restiveness of sorts, largely political. General Yakubu Gowon had been ousted from power in July of 1975, after failing to return the country to democratic governance, going back on his promise to do so. Nigerians have also become burdened by a military regime where civil liberties were curtailed and an exercise of the right to free speech could gift one a time out in the detention camp of the notorious National Security Organisation (NSO). Military brutality as a state art became commonplace and was hugely under-reported as most media organisations had been decreed into state control.

The stage was set for PUNCH, one of the very few private newspapers around to fulfil its professional mandate, even in the face of glaring threats to its existence. It rose to the occasion fiercely, deploying its cover and news pages to report excesses of the military government and the instances of corrupt practices as they break. The no-holds-barred news reports and commentary, backed by telling photography and stinging



•Osinubi

cartoons presented in the humourous, constituted the firing planks in the battle of nerves with the marauding adventurers. That era signposts the birth of the real PUNCH, the one that lives to the true meaning and essence of its name.

The invasion of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's 'Kalakuta Republic' by rampaging soldiers on February 18, 1977, was an event too brutal and mindless to be ignored or denied adequate coverage by any responsible media organisation.

The PUNCH stood out of the pack in its copious report of the orgy of violence, which Fela himself registered for posterity in 'Sorrow, Tears and Blood'. A renowned freelance photographer, Peter Obe, had recorded the arson in pictures, which PUNCH paid for and splashed on its cover page two days after. No other newspaper was that daring. The Nigerian Army denied the involvement of its soldiers in the arson and harassed the PUNCH for a rebuttal, which it never got. The government, in an attempt to clear itself of complicity in the act, instituted a judicial inquiry headed by Justice Kalu Anya which turned out the infamous verdict that an 'unknown soldier' was responsible for the assault on Fela and his household. The battle line was drawn between the PUNCH and the Military.

Their response was swift and deadly, featuring detention of its journalists, long spells of closure, outright proscription, and attempted murder. It makes me shudder to recall the instance of Abacha's murder squad, chasing after our then chairman, Chief Ajibola Ogunshola on the Third Mainland bridge, right up to Aromire Avenue/Adeniyi Jones junction in Ikeja. He would have been taken out, but for God, working through his skilful driver who outmanoeuvred them when it mattered most.

Over the decades, PUNCH as a company had become adept at punching its way to survival on many fronts. Industry cartels had risen in arms against it at various times and stages to viciously challenge policies initiated by the company, aimed at rescuing it and other media organisations from their philistine stranglehold. All of these had not gone in vain. Bruised at many points, no doubt, but it remains unbowed and its integrity solid and unimpeached still.

Joyfully, there is quite a lot to show in growth, industry strength, gravitas, national relevance, infrastructural and sustainability capacities, and materials terms for the odyssey of a half-century. Above all else, the future is reassuringly promising.

It is deliberate not to have attached names of who played what roles in the company over the years and at various levels of engagement except for the excerpted parts. The list will fill up the space allotted for this contribution. For the purpose of this special publication and indeed, for all time, all Punchers past and present are heroes and heroines of the Punch story. To us all, my hat I doff.

Back to Muiyiwa Adetiba, I can only imagine his headline for the story of PUNCH at 50.

Congratulations all.

Editor's note: Osinubi, a journalist and lawyer, joined PUNCH as a reporter in 1976 and retired in 2022 after a distinguished career as the editor of all of PUNCH's three titles at different times and as the longest serving Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief in Nigeria's media history after serving in the office for 27 years

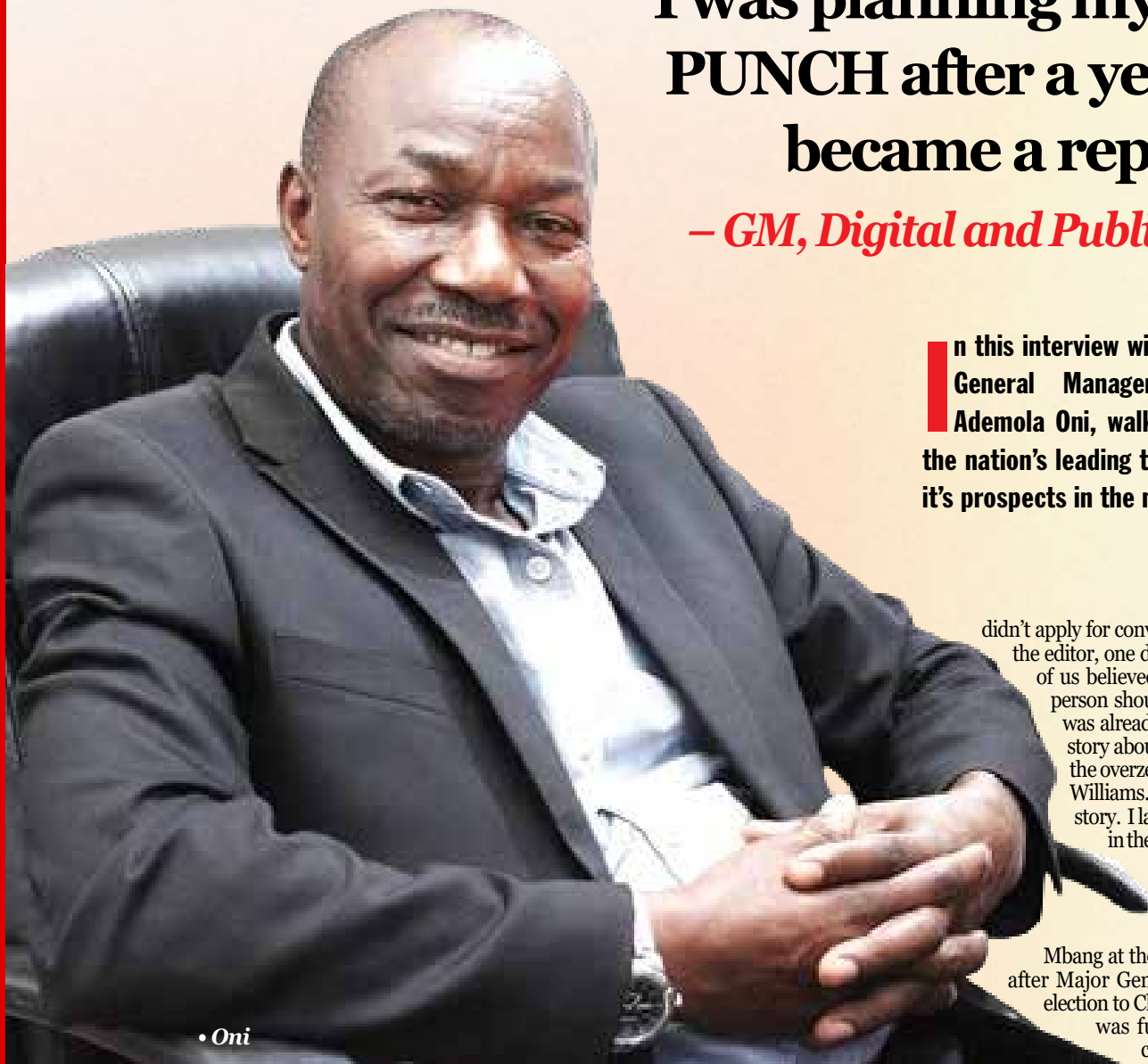
**THE STAGE WAS
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GLARING THREATS
TO ITS EXISTENCE**





I was planning my exit from PUNCH after a year when I became a reporter

– GM, Digital and Publications, Oni



• Oni

In this interview with JUWE OLUWAFEMI, PUNCH's General Manager, Digital and Publication, Ademola Oni, walks us through his journey into the nation's leading tabloid and assuredly posits on its prospects in the next 10 years

didn't apply for conversion; didn't apply to be a reporter but the editor, one day, called us to his office and said if any of us believed he could do better as a reporter, the person should speak up. Meanwhile, before then, I was already writing stories and features. I wrote a story about my arrest during the 2003 election by the overzealous DPO of Alausa police division, one Williams. Some people asked me who wrote the story. I laughed because some of my course mates in the then Ogun Poly, Abeokuta, were working as reporters in the newspaper.

There was this one that was a bit funny. I attended a press conference organised by the late Prelate Sunday Mbang at the Methodist Cathedral in Marina. It was after Major General Muhammadu Buhari (ret.) lost election to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003. Mbang was furious with Buhari on why he would challenge the case in court. So, he said Buhari should be arrested. The headline of the story was: 'Arrest Buhari now – Mbang'.

I was only a photographer but as a trained mass communicator, I knew what he said was heavy, and there was no reporter from the PUNCH at the press conference. When I got to the newsroom, I called the then Politics Editor, Dotun Oladipo, who's now the Publisher of The Eagle Online. Interestingly, Dotun and I graduated the same year from Ogun Polytechnic. Another person who also graduated together with me was Adekunle Salami who was the sport editor that time. Those were the ones that mounted pressure on the editor to call me when the photographer he (editor) preferred left. Another course mate was the immediate past editor of ThisDay on Saturday, Yemi Adebawale, who was also in the newsroom then. Dotun anchored the story because I was also asked to leave for another assignment on Victoria Island. The story was the cover story the next day, but my name was missing from the byline.

There as a reason for that. The Politics Editor said when he had planned the story, the editor queried why my name appeared. He couldn't tell him (editor) that I was the one who attended the press conference. He couldn't have told the editor that no reporter from *The PUNCH* attended the press conference because he knew that the man would spit out fire. The editor, according to Dotun, asked that my name be removed.

When it was the end of February when I had made up my mind to leave to fully concentrate on my photo business in order to do something with my life, that was when a letter came from the admin in The PUNCH to the effect that those of us (photographers) who had graduated were converted to reporters. I can remember three other graduate photographers -- Dayo Ayeyemi, Kunle Awosiyi and Femi Makinde – who were also converted. Funningly enough, my name also came up that I had been converted.

Aside from the above beat, where else did you work at the PUNCH?

From Lagos West, I was redeployed to the sports desk. I told you my course mate, Adekunle Salami, was the sports editor.

Fast forward to 2007, when Steve Ayorinde and the present Managing Director, Adeyeye Joseph, were appointed as editors, I was posted to Abeokuta as the state correspondent. In Ogun State, God allowed the my work to speak for me.

What was your experience like in Ogun State?

At the time, the pregnancy of the crises that attended the second term of Otunba Gbenga Daniel as governor was just incubating. In an atmosphere of crisis, a good reporter must thrive in stories. I was churning out stories like there would be no tomorrow. Stories were coming out everywhere. It wasn't all rosy in Ogun State. I was marked; I was threatened; I was to be injured. At a time, the information machinery of the state government, led by the then commissioner, Mr Sina Kawonise, petitioned my office, requesting that I be transferred from the state. I wrote a story where the Alake of Egbaland, pleaded with the Daniel administration to repair some of the bad roads within

YOU'VE been a part of the success story that is the PUNCH Newspapers Group. Pls share with us how you became a strong part of this team?

I never planned to be a practising journalist. After the mandatory National Youth Service Corps at Osun State, I had planned to go into business. I have always been in a hurry as a person, especially during my formative years. I was so much in a hurry that in Primary four, I sat for an entrance examination into secondary school because I wanted to finish everything quickly.

So, after graduation and service, I already made up my mind not to be a journalist though I was good in writing. I believe going into business would give me a lot of money.

So, between 1993 through 2003, that was within a space of 10 years, I only tried to seek an employment in a media house only once in my life, at the defunct 'Third Eye' in Ibadan. To be honest with you, I wasn't really sure I was interested in the job.

Towards the end of 2002, there was a vacancy advert in The PUNCH for a photographer. At this period, I was already engaged to a girl who is now my wife and doing well as a photographer, too. It was coincidental and more interesting because my fiancée told me of the same advert in The PUNCH, not knowing that I already saw it but didn't do anything about it. She advised that since it was a job placement along my line (photography), I should apply and I obliged. But with a proviso: That it won't disturb my business. So, I reluctantly applied.

I topped both the interview and the test sessions, but didn't get the job. The runner up got it. I wasn't even bothered because at that time, I was also preparing for my court wedding in January 2003. The candidate that got the job (he was somebody that I knew) reported for the job. He came only once and never returned to PUNCH. So, those who saw my scores went back to the editor and told him that his preferred candidate came once and never showed up again. I wouldn't know what happened but the man went to Financial Standard also as a reporter.

So, how did things finally pan out in your favour?

I was asked to resume January 22, but the day fell on my wedding day (court wedding). I wrote back to the PUNCH management that I couldn't resume on that day. Although I didn't state the reasons but I told them I would resume on January 27, which I did. My first salary was seized for reasons we may not go into. Meanwhile, my church wedding was billed for February 22.

...(cuts in) Why did you think he seized your salary?

I don't want to go into details, but he said I wasn't bringing exclusive photographs and that I wasn't reporting to the office. At a particular time, I was asked to report to the then Deputy Editor, Dr. Akin Olaniyo. Our relationship is still intact till date. So, he (editor) wrote to Olaniyo that I had absconded, but Olaniyan defended me that I didn't abscond; that I was in the office the previous day. Then, they asked the head of the photo desk, Alhaji Bayo Ewuoso, who told the then editor that I never absconded. I didn't even let anybody know that my first month salary wasn't paid and that my wedding was at hand. I wasn't even bothered because I didn't come to PUNCH to get money for my wedding. So, the wedding held and it was successful. Surprisingly in March, they paid the money that was hitherto seized along with my March salary and promptly.

When I was getting to about one year in The PUNCH, I told God that if nothing changed about the job, I would quit. I found the photo job boring; boring in the sense that I was doing the same thing over and over every day. Naturally and mentally, I wasn't cut for that kind of assignment.

Now, you will begin to wonder that somebody who said if nothing changes he would leave

Abeokuta. And, of course, he was saying the truth. The roads were bad.

What really happened on the Alake issue?

The pastor of the then Latter Rain Assembly, (now Citadel Global Community Church, Lagos), Pastor Tunde Bakare, who is also from Abeokuta, built a facility around 2009 in the Sodeke area to depict the reported first Bible in Abeokuta. The Alake was the royal father of the day. So, after the assignment, I was asked to interview the Alake of Egbaland because he was inspecting a museum. It was Tunde Bakare's father's house that the pastor remodelled in Iporo Sokeke. I asked the Alake about the bad roads in town and he simply responded that the state of the roads in Abeokuta was shameful and that government should do something about them.

Then, on Monday when the story was published in *The PUNCH*, one small story, all hell was let loose in Abeokuta. The government inferred that the story had a political undertone. By the end of that Monday, the government was already toying with the idea of dethroning and banishing the revered monarch to Ode Omi in Ogun Waterside. Interestingly, I started my leave on the same day of publication. I didn't bother going back to Abeokuta for the next 24 days because I was aware that some people were looking for my head.

The same Alake summoned me at a particular time because I wrote another story. My stories landed me in a lot of trouble in Ogun State. I wrote that some Obas were supporting some governors from Ogun West and then the monarch summoned me to his palace to give me a warning.

Was there another remarkable experience you remember?

In 2008, the crisis between the State House of Assembly and the executive had blown open. There was the National Schools Sports Festival, not the National Sports Festival, that was to come up then. Taraba State had rejected the hosting right because it claimed not to have money. So, they approached Ogun State, and the state accepted to host the festival. The only problem at that time was that Ogun State was owing teachers and they had been on strike for six weeks just as doctors too were on strike for 48 days. So, the State House of Assembly urged the state government to prioritise its spending. Unfortunately for them, Otunba Gbenga Daniel was to deliver a lecture that day at the National Institute for Strategic Studies, Kuru, near Jos, Plateau State. That was where the governor chose to reply the state House of Assembly, and his words were very acidic. He said the House of Assembly was full of uneducated and ill-informed people. I had to reach out to the Assembly first to seek its reaction. The Speaker, Tunji Egbetokun, was the first person that I called, but he asked me to get in touch with the Deputy, Remmy Hazzan, because he was more confrontational. Hazzan said the governor was more uneducated and ill-informed than the lawmakers. Trust me, I wrote a beautiful story out of it. So, there was this radio station -- Rock City FM, Abeokuta. It had a call-in programme, and that story became the topic of that day. Scores of listeners called to discuss the story and the conflict. By noon of that day, there was a meeting at Oke Mosan and a Bishop, who was one of the advisers to the governor, called me and located me in Abeokuta to inform me about a plot against me. The Bishop is a friend to my pastor by the way.

So, the bishop called me and said, 'Demola, where are you?' And I told him that I was at Iwe Irohin. Coincidentally for my annual leave. So, I already packed my load to start going to Lagos because my leave was to start on Monday. The Bishop drove personally to Iwe Irohin and called me outside the main building. He told me that they had finished a meeting where I was marked to be 'wounded', that my troubles were becoming too much. For writing ordinary stories! Immediately, I took off to Lagos and away for another three weeks.

That was the way things were until August 2010. Then, I was running a programme at the University of Ibadan for my Master's Degree. The present Managing Director, who was the editor, then called and said I was needed on Saturday PUNCH's desk as the Assistant Editor, News. Meanwhile, I was only a Senior Correspondent, and not even a Chief Correspondent. I was promoted Senior Correspondent on my sixth year, for the very first time, in 2009 in *The PUNCH*.

Six months into my tenure on the Saturday PUNCH desk, the present MD, who was then the Editor, *The PUNCH*, called me to his office and said, "We want to change our News Editor." I was curious because my appointment on the Saturday desk hadn't been confirmed. He said, "You are going to be the next News Editor." I laughed, and I asked him if he had forgotten that my appointment as an Assistant Editor on Saturday PUNCH had yet to be confirmed? That didn't stop the appointment anyway.

In 2013, I became the Online Editor. To the glory of God, I spent two years on PUNCH online and I was redeployed back to *The PUNCH* newsroom.

Punchng, during my time, broke the news on the death of the Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade; very risky story. Somebody who was close to the palace gave me the story.

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF PUNCH OFFERS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONOUR ITS RESILIENT LEGACY AMIDST THE HARSH ECONOMIC REALITIES FACING THE PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY TODAY



• Oni

I was again returned to the newsroom, where I spent about two years - 2015 to 2017. Along the line, I had a very bad experience. I was already an acting editor of Sunday PUNCH at that time. We ran a story that turned out to have been written by another newspaper as our cover story. I got a suspension for that 2017 until God turned it around in 2018, and I still became the editor of Sunday PUNCH.

There was a 'little crisis' too in July 2019 where two editors had to step down within 24 hours. I was the third and the only surviving one, and I became the Editor, *The PUNCH* in 2019. Then, in 2022, after three years of being editor of *The PUNCH*, I stepped up as the Head of Content which was later redesignated as General Manager, Digital and Publications. Apart from God, I need to pay special gratitude to Mr. Adeyeye Joseph, the current Managing Director, for his continual support and for seeing in me what I didn't even see. We became friends later. We are more of brothers even at the moment. This is a man who does not have any issue with anybody. It is not all the time that you will see people who are brilliant and, at the same time, humble. Most brilliant people are very proud but this one is brilliant, creative, wide and deep. He's also deeply humble. I call him 'oga Afenifere'. Afenifere in his own case is looking for ways to always lift you up even people who do not deserve to be lifted up.

What would you say that has kept PUNCH going for this 50 years?

Well, it's the management; the set standard. In PUNCH, something that is unchangeable is the power to always improve on the set standard while having a planned focus for the future. At a time, most journalists would not want to work with PUNCH. Why? It believes in staying to standard and the ingredient to strengthen that standard - discipline. If you say you are the market leader, you must build structures that will help you to stay at the top. It's easy to get to the top but not easy to stay there because others are eyeing where you are; they want to get there. Over the years, PUNCH has had very solid management, especially when Mr. Ademola Osinubi (as the MD) and Chairman Emeritus Baba Ajibola Ogunshola, were in charge. They formed that partnership that even when you put them in charge of Nigeria, Nigeria would have been a success story. After Baba Ogunshola, we also had the entrance of Mr. Wale Aboderin, a very humble, highly organised and brilliant man, whom we lost some years ago. The partnership of the current Chairman, Mrs. Angela Emuwa, and current MD, Mr. Adeyeye Joseph, has been lifting PUNCH higher from what they met. One can't be afraid to work in PUNCH when you have a committed and passionate woman of steel as chairman and a versatile and brilliant MD.

Again let me shock you. During the Covid-2020 lockdown, PUNCH was about the only newspaper at the time paying salaries regularly in Nigeria.

Having seen the greater part of PUNCH, what does this 50th golden anniversary mean to you?

It means a lot of things. It's the power of creativity and perseverance. It's also the manifestation of determination never to give in to adversities; the manifestation of foresight and planning. Sometimes, you have farsight and sometimes, you have foresight, but you need to match the two to be able to achieve greatness in the days to come. If you feel you are doing something and you are moving all motion, no movement, you will discover that change will meet you at that spot and leave you behind. But *The PUNCH* usually anticipates - that's farsight and then plan for the future - foresight. As I am talking to you now, we are already planning 20 years ahead so that by the time those things come, they won't meet you just at the same level because when change catches up with you, you will be left dry and shocked. So, in the case of PUNCH, it has been blessed with great leaders, and like I told you, these people that God has placed in PUNCH to run it for that 50 years would have managed Nigeria and would have achieved success.

Where do we expect to find PUNCH in the next 10 years?

Well, like I said, because of foresight or farsight, we are already moving ahead. We are projecting into the years ahead. I don't want to make any policy statement, but one thing that I know is that in the next 10 years, PUNCH will be running its media group. We have a modern broadcast studio from where we can broadcast live to homes. We ran it when Omoyele Sowore contested the presidential election in 2023. We hosted him during an interview at *The PUNCH* Place, and we broadcast it live. So, I'm not

telling you about what we want to do, we have started it. We ran a live broadcast of analysis of AFCON in Ivory Coast right from our studio. PUNCH has essentially developed and diversified its digital capacity and also its content generating power. We will be generating contents for others because the traditional media will always be there, but we also need to widen our horizons about the things that we can do to stay ahead.

As part of these laudable achievements, what specifics would you like implemented in PUNCH as it were now?

I would rather talk about the limitations that we have in terms of our environment and our people. Our people believe so much in telephones, they no longer read. I had an encounter about two days ago or was it yesterday? There was a manual in a Mercedes Benz car. When somebody got into the car, he thought the car was not starting. They said maybe it was battery or the fuel pump. Eventually, they discovered that what they were supposed to check was just the manual that was inside the car. They didn't check the manual. They would have followed the instructions. What I described is just a microcosm of Nigeria. We do not read the manual. How do we read the manual? You don't check for any information, especially from the newspapers. The manual is there but our people won't read it. It's the same thing as newspapers. People don't read newspapers. Students now prefer going to the classroom with the phone, and sometimes, when the teacher is lecturing, they send text or chat. Some people will stay two hours on the phone. Those are time wasters. Go to the airport now, in the check-in area. Just check everybody there if you have 10 people there, seven of them will be on their phones chatting. People no longer read.



PLATEAU STATE GOVERNMENT



SEVEN (7) FOCAL POINTS OF THE GREEN CAP POLICY THRUST

1. **Good Governance and Citizens' Participation in sustainable Development.**
2. **Peace, Security and Social Justice.**
3. **Revamping Agriculture and Rural Transformation.**
4. **Education and Human Capital Development**
5. **Public Health, Environment, Tourism and Mineral Development.**
6. **Infrastructure and Industrialization.**
7. **Taxation, Resource Mobilization and Investment.**



His Excellency,
BARR. CALEB MANASSEH MUTFWANG
Executive Governor of Plateau State



Her Excellency,
NGO JOSEPHINE PIYO
Deputy Governor, Plateau State



ROADS CONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION



**PLATEAU STATE GOVERNMENT
GOVERNOR CALEB MUTFWANG'S
9 MONTHS AT A GLANCE...**

Despite the security challenges and legal disputes that initially hindered the smooth commencement of his administration, His Excellency, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang has remained steadfast in addressing the state's challenges and delivering democratic dividends across all sectors of the

Over the past nine months, his interventions, includes road rehabilitation, provision of medical equipment, distribution of fertilizer and other farming inputs to farmers, provision of security vehicles and training of security personnel, and the launch of the Plateau Intelligent Revenue Billing System, among

REJUVENATING RAIL TRANSPORT IN JOS BUKURU METROPOLIS



REVAMPING STATE SECURITY OUTFIT

Presentation of Security vehicles/training of state security operatives - Operation Rainbow



AGRICULTURE

Providing fertilizer and other farming inputs to farmers



SPORTS

Presentation of 28-seater bus and training kits to Mighty Jets International



HEALTH

Presentation of dental equipment to the College of Health Sciences, University of Jos



REVENUE

Launch of Plateau Intelligent Revenue Billing System



**HAPPY 50TH
ANNIVERSARY TO AN
OUTSTANDING
COMPANY**



Indeed, it has been half a century of vibrant media practice and impactful contributions.

Your journey laced with hard-work, dedication to duty, ethical commitment and doggedness is certainly an inspiration for all.

No doubt, this 50th anniversary remains an incredible milestone and you deserve the spotlight to celebrate the moment.

Indeed, the government and the good people of Plateau State under the leadership of "The Time is Now" administration of His Excellency, **Barrister Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang** is proud to associate with your unique brand of journalism practice. It is also proud to highlight its own achievements in road construction and rehabilitation; rejuvenation of rail transport in the Jos-Bukuru metropolis; resuscitation of the state security outfit, Operation Rainbow; provision of fertilizer and other farming inputs; introduction of the Plateau Intelligent Revenue Billing System; and provision of dental equipment to the Jos University Teaching Hospital, among others.

Congratulations on reaching this uncommon feat and we wish the company even more successes in the years ahead.

Hon. Musa Ibrahim Ashoms,
Plateau State Commissioner of Information and Communication.



PUNCH created room for my career growth

– *Punch's longest serving employee, Gbemuotor*

Longest Serving PUNCHer, Mrs Folakemi Gbemuotor, who is the current General Manager, Corporate Services, PUNCH Nigeria Limited, speaks to VICTORIA EDEME on her experiences and the various positions she has held in her 33-year stay in the company

WHAT are those things many people in the company don't know about you?

My name is Olufolakemi Gbemuotor (nee Ashley) General Manager, Corporate Services Division. There's nothing a lot of my colleagues don't know about me. What you see is what I am. No pretense and I strive to be objective in all that I do in the process of my daily duties and responsibilities. I hold my office in high esteem.

What was your childhood like?

I was born October 2, 1967, at Island Maternity Hospital, Lagos Island into the family of Mr. Simeon Obafemi and Alhaja Bintu Ashley, (nee Maiyegun-Lawal) both of blessed memory. We lived in Maroko in Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State. I am the eighth of ten children of our parents. I grew up in a Christian-Muslim home and it was fun then because we celebrated all the religious festivals in our home and it was peaceful. My grandfather, Thomas Ashley, a Sierra Leonean settled in the Sandgrouse area of Lagos Island where he lived and had his children. My paternal grandmother, fondly called Mama Potatoe was from the Gloucester family of Lagos Island. My mother was from the Maiyegun family of Eti-Osa, Lagos State.

Do you mind sharing your educational background with us?

My primary education was at Ireti Girls School, South-West, Ikoyi, Lagos. From there to Aunty Ayo Girls Comprehensive Secondary School, Keffi Street, S.W. Ikoyi, Lagos for my secondary education. I studied Secretarial Studies at the Young Women's Christian Association Vocational Institute, Moloney, Lagos Island, and was awarded a Confidential Secretary Grade 2 certificate. I had my tertiary education at Lagos State University, Ojo where I studied English Language, B.A English. I am an alumnus of Lagos Business School where I attended the Senior Management Programme (SMP 54). I also attended management training at the American Management Association, in New York, United States of America to mention a few.

When did you join PUNCH Nigeria Limited?

I joined PUNCH Nigeria Limited on November 26, 1990.

How did your career path progress in the organisation?

I started as a Confidential Secretary grade 2 (CS II) to the Deputy Editor, Mr. Chris Mammah. I was promoted to the office of the Editor, Mr. Ademola Osinubi in 1991 as his Confidential Secretary. Then in 1992, he was promoted to the office of the General Manager and I was opportuned to move with him. Afterwards, I became the Executive Assistant to the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief in 2004. In 2008, I was promoted to Senior Executive Assistant to the MD/E-i-C on the management level. In 2015, I moved to the Administration department as the Manager, Administration, and later on, Manager, Human Capital & Facilities. In year 2021, I became a Senior Manager as Head, Corporate Services & Culture Division before the change of designation to General Manager, Corporate Services in year 2022.

It's been 33 years of your corporate sojourn in PUNCH. How would you describe your years in the coy?

I've been 33 years in PUNCH to the glory of God. I can confidently say that God has been good to me. I spent my youthful years in PUNCH and it has been worth my while. PUNCH created room for growth in my career. I joined PUNCH with a certificate and had the opportunity to pursue a degree programme while in the employment of the organisation and attended courses on human resources and management.

How did you cope with the job when you got married?

It was hectic and a tough one. Before I got married in 1992, I worked six days a week, Sunday through Friday as the Editor's secretary. The Editor then, Mr. Osinubi edited all the PUNCH titles, because there were no weekend editors. That changed when I got married and started working five days a week. Though my husband was working in a television station then, so he understood the demands of the job. When I started having my children, I had support from family members, because I had to work late hours and was able to cope with work optimally without failing in my responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Our children had to attend boarding schools because of the demands of the job.

What would you consider to be your high and low moments in your 33 years at PUNCH?

My high moments include when we were deproscribed and we all returned to work.

Also, I feel so proud as a Puncher, when our brand became the most read in Nigeria and started to win awards locally and internationally. This reflected on the finances of the company and gave room for better welfare package to staff. As we speak, PUNCH is the highest-paying Media house in Nigeria. The low moments for me were during the closure and proscription of PUNCH by the Babangida military administration. We had a temporary office of a space of three bedroom flat situated at a block of six flats at Cement Bus Stop, along the Lagos/Abeokuta Expressway. About 80 per cent of the staff strength were advised to stay off work then. For a few of us that were retained, we started producing and selling exercise books for sustenance. We had to drive to the car park at Secretariat Alausa to display the exercise books on the bonnet of the van. It was depressing. We would be under the sun canvassing to passersby to buy our exercise books.

Have you ever felt the need to leave the company at any point. What happened?

There was never a time I felt like leaving. Even during our trying times, especially, when we were being persecuted by the military junta, it never crossed my mind to leave, because I saw a brighter future.

What are the fond memories you have about the company?

My fond memories include the bonding, the love, the camaraderie and the family ties we share. The conducive warm work environment. One can only get such when the leadership leads by example and does not compromise staff welfare. A healthy staff is a happy staff.

As a person, what challenges did you face while working with the company?

When I was a secretary, some of my colleagues expected me to compromise my position and disclose classified information. Failing to do so earned me unfavourable names like 'Madam Thatcher,' 'Iron Lady,' and so on. Also, Information technology, digitalisation in particular, has helped to resolve a lot of administrative processes, but, some are yet to embrace this new technology and it is always a challenge for the Human Capital now.

What has kept you going in spite of these challenges?

In spite of these challenges, I held onto my job etiquette and remained focused. I was brought up in a disciplined home where morals and uprightness are key in our daily lives. That has kept me going.

Do you have words for young employees?

My advice to my younger colleagues is that they should remain focused, dedicated and disciplined. They should imbibe the culture of excellence and certainly, great success awaits them.

What in your estimation is the future of newspaper business in Nigeria?

The future of newspapering in Nigeria will be bright. The economic situation in the country has affected the number of sales coupled with the advent of online news reportage. I see both surviving side by side. Let's take a quick look at the Western world where there has been online news dissemination, the hardcopy tabloid is still playing an integral part of the business. Aside from dailies circulating in the early hours of the day, evening tabloids are seen at train and bus stations from about 5 pm. It is part of us as humans to want to keep hard copies of interesting editions for the records. Moreover, there is still a wide range of areas not covered by internet services but that can only be reached by the print media. Those areas are in large numbers. Let's not forget that core advertisers of products still prefer placing advertorials and notices in the newspapers because of the mileage and lifespan of such placements. In Nigeria, Newspapering still has a future.

What do you wish PUNCH at 50?

My wish for PUNCH at 50 is that it remains the leader in the industry and retains the ethical and professional values that had been laid down by the founders, and past and present management. We all know the value the PUNCH titles stand for, the TRIBE - Truth, Reliability, Independence, Balance, and Excellence. I pray PUNCH will continue to grow in leaps and bounds, breaking new barriers, and the global and local awards will continue to adorn *The PUNCH* awards gallery.



• Gbemuotor

Good journalism practice will guarantee your success at PUNCH – Editor *The PUNCH*, Oketola

SPECIAL INTERVIEW

In this interview with SAMUEL BOLAJI, Editor, *The PUNCH*, Mr Adedayo Oketola, talks about his journey from becoming a journalist to rising to the position of the editor of the most widely read newspaper

At what point in your life did you choose to become a journalist, and what motivated that decision?

I didn't start as a journalist and didn't want to be one. As a very young boy, there was a time when I desired to be an accountant. But after that phase of my life, I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. So, all my energy was targeted at becoming a lawyer. That's a story for another day because I didn't initially study Law in school; I studied English. So, after NYSC, I wanted to work in an advertising agency as a copywriter, and I did work with an agency, but eventually, I moved on. I later worked in a real estate firm in Lagos. Though I had a stint as a campus journalist at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, I decided that I needed to do something more intellectually challenging while at the real estate firm, and I chose journalism. Specifically, I chose to work at PUNCH Nigeria Limited.

Walk us through your journey from joining PUNCH to becoming the Editor

On October 16, 2008, I joined *The PUNCH* as a Business Correspondent, covering beats such as appointment and management/labour, ICT, aviation, and later, energy. I was a business and economy reporter until May 16, 2014, when I was appointed acting Head of News and Politics for *Saturday PUNCH*. I was later confirmed, and I did that till May 7, 2018, when I was appointed as acting Assistant Editor of the General News Division of *The PUNCH*.

After six months as News Editor, on November 1, 2018, I was appointed Business Editor of *The PUNCH*. I did that until July 10, 2019, when I was appointed acting Editor of the Weekend Titles, which was the first time *Saturday PUNCH* and *Sunday PUNCH* would be merged. So, I did that from 2019 to April 4, 2022, when I was appointed Editor of *The PUNCH*. That has been my journey so far.

Could you share with us a memorable experience you had in the early part of your career at PUNCH?

It's interesting. There's this experience that I always remember. I can't forget about it in a hurry. I remember I joined *The PUNCH* in October 2008, and Christmas of that year, because we have a tradition in our family that wherever you may be in the world, everybody spends Christmas with our parents. So I was at my family's house and just about to have my Christmas amala and vegetables when a call came in from the office. We were at the Mangoro office at the time. It was a call from my then Business Editor, Mr Ayo Olesin, who said, "Ogbeni, where are you?" and replied, "Sir, I'm at home. I'm about to have my Christmas meal." And the Business Editor told me, "If you don't want to end this year with a query, you had better be in the office now." I just left the food to my mom's surprise. So, I just took a bike straight to the office from the house, and that was how it began for me. I've never stopped loving the job since then. And I can tell you that between 2008 and last year (2023), I'm not sure I've had three Christmas celebrations with my family. You know, you are always at work. Anyway, it's also fun celebrating Christmas in the newsroom.

How did you feel when appointed as The PUNCH's Editor?

It came as a surprise because of the timing. Don't forget, it was not the first time I would be appointed an editor. I was, at the time, the Editor of the Weekend Titles. The appointment as the Weekend Titles Editor shocked me because we were taken through a rigorous interview session. While we thought that two editors would be appointed, I was appointed to handle the two weekend newspapers- *Saturday PUNCH* and *Sunday PUNCH*. So, that came as a surprise. I remember that after the interview, I was in the newsroom as the Business Editor when I was summoned to the boardroom. I met our former MD/ Editor-in-Chief, Sir Ademola Oshinubi, and the current MD/E-I-C, Mr Adeyeye Joseph, who was the Executive Director then. They called me to the boardroom and gave me the appointment letter. When I opened the letter, it was an appointment as Weekend Titles Editor to manage the two weekend newspapers. I was shocked as

I didn't know whether to be happy or worried for myself. However, the MD/E-I-C then encouraged me, saying, "God will give you the strength to shoulder this responsibility." I said, amen and went straight into my car to take a nap for about 20 minutes to soak in all that had happened before I went into the newsroom. By the time I got into the newsroom, words had gone around that I had been appointed. My friends and colleagues welcomed me with applause, which was how the work started. So, the Weekend Editor appointment was a shock because I wasn't expecting it. However, when I was appointed Editor of *The PUNCH*, the shock element wasn't really there. The MD/ E-I-C just sent for me, and when I saw him, he said, 'You are the next Editor of *The PUNCH*, and it starts on Monday.'

And this was on a Thursday. I couldn't believe it because I knew the position has many responsibilities. But by and large, I would say I give God the glory. I am so grateful to the former MD/E-I-C and my current E-I-C for the confidence reposed in me. I do not take it for granted.

Tell us your greatest achievements as a Puncher and as Editor, The PUNCH

It's difficult to sum up my achievements into one point, first as a PUNCHman and editor. It's difficult because I believe in celebrating small victories and small wins.

• Oketola



But I can talk about some things I am grateful for. First, I consider it an achievement that I successfully managed the Saturday and *Sunday PUNCH* merger because these were two distinct titles hitherto handled by two editors. However, we had to merge two teams with two different characters because of the titles they were working for. So, for me, it was either I sank or swam, which was tough; I wouldn't say that it wasn't tough. However, the fact that we could handle the transition, merge the two teams and stabilise remains an important career milestone for me.

It could have gone south, which would have incinerated everything I believed I had done as a PUNCHman because they would say, 'But we appointed him editor of the two titles, but he bungled it.' So, the fact that I didn't bungle it and I was again considered for higher responsibilities is an achievement I do not joke with.

The opportunity the PUNCH platform has given me to showcase my abilities and what I'm capable of doing in journalism and getting accolades locally and internationally is an achievement I do not also take for granted. Give and take, my name has been featured in more than 25 local and international awards. I won a fair number of them, the latest being Editor of the Year and Newspaper of the Year at the Nigeria Media Merit Award 2023. I do not take these things for granted. We have done innumerable impact stories that triggered change in many societal areas of need, and we consider this an achievement.

What are your greatest challenges as the Editor of The PUNCH?

Well, let me start by saying that being the Editor of *The PUNCH* alone is enough of a challenge for anyone because you are sitting on a hot seat. Apart from delivering good journalism, you are expected to maintain the high standard that *The PUNCH* is known for and continually represent the key principles that the company holds dear in your output. You also carry the burden of maintaining the excellent journalism done by people who sat on the seat before you. So, being Editor of *The PUNCH* comes with challenges because it means that you shoulder the legacies of past editors who had sat on this seat. You're talking about the likes of Adeyeye Joseph, the current MD and Editor-in-Chief of *The PUNCH*, and former editors such as Ademola Oni, Martin Ayankola, Steve Ayorinde, Yusuf Ali, Azubuike Ishikwene, Gbemiga Ogunleye, Tunji Adegboyega, Bola Bolawole, Mr Ademola Oshinubi, our revered and respected former MD; Alhaji Nojeem Jimoh, Nurudeen Balogun, and Innocent Adikwu, among others. These great men of letters and good journalism sat on this seat. So, you cannot afford to make nonsense of the legacies they left behind. That's challenging enough.

Maintaining the pressure of everyday work and the corporate legacy of being a newspaper of record and the most prominent newspaper brand in the country that people trust is equally challenging. But beyond all that, there are other industrial-related challenges we all have to battle with, like the dearth of good hands to do painstaking journalism. Many talented ones are not ready to go the extra mile with you; they leave at every opportunity. That is also challenging. Every day presents different challenges to you as a newspaper editor, not to mention the Editor of *The PUNCH*.

How do you handle work pressure, especially when it's coming from your superior?

It comes with the terrain. One of the reasons *The PUNCH* is considered the best is our consistency. So, it's not pressure, per se. For us, it's about quality control. I would be wrong to tell you that I don't understand the enormous responsibility placed on my shoulders as the Editor of *The PUNCH*. But what you consider as pressure is not pressure. It's quality control. That's why the people reporting to me must be put on their toes to do their job. There are people I report to that must ensure I do not fall out of line. So, how do I handle it? I handle it by following the process.

You get the job done once you follow the proper process laid down by your superior and the company. I also handle pressure by being focused, being consistent with myself, developing very tough skin for criticism, and learning from past mistakes. And above all, I also take things to God. I can tell you for a fact that there's nothing I've achieved without God being involved.

How does it feel being the 50th-anniversary Editor?

Well, how am I supposed to feel? I feel privileged. I feel happy. And I feel, yes, I feel generally privileged that I'm

the editor at this auspicious moment of our darling media giant.

It could have been anybody. It's an opportunity to be the editor when the company celebrates its 50th anniversary. And as I said earlier, I do not sit here alone. I'm representing all the past editors, about 16 of whom have also sat here. I respect their efforts, and whenever I look at their pictures in my office, I summon the courage to continue to do well so as to finish strong.

I consider it a privilege, and I'm grateful to God. I also hope to be here when the company celebrates its centennial anniversary. Of course, you know what adding that 50 years to my current age means. It means I will be very, very old. But if the Lord grants me the opportunity, I'd like to be here to celebrate with the company.

How do you balance work, family, and social life?

It's tough. Journalism is a very demanding job. It takes away a whole lot of things from you. But it is your duty to maintain a strong work-life balance. You must find what helps you relax.

I pay attention to what matters. I don't have a lot of time, I know. But the little that I have, I try to give it to my family. And I also try to maintain a modest social circle. You need it, not necessarily because of today, but because of when you are no longer as active as you are now. You need a community. And I have such a community. So, I spend my time with my family. I also maintain a modest social life.

I also try to read and I love travelling. For me, travelling is therapeutic. It's one of the things I like to do to reduce work pressure. Yes, once in a while, I swim.

I also do a lot of other things. All of them are quite time-consuming, but I manage them to keep things in perspective, maintain good health, exercise, and spend quality family time. I do not joke with that.

What advice do you have for up-and-coming journalists, especially prospective Punchers?

Yes, as a manager and an accomplished journalist, you can't survive or succeed as a journalist if you have no passion for the job. You must have passion because good journalism in a place like *The PUNCH* will test your grit. It will push you. It will test your resilience. So, if you don't have passion for the job, you have no business being here. As a manager of men and resources, I can say that if you don't have passion for the job, it becomes a problem for your line editors. You must also be ready to learn. A good journalist, even a good editor, is a life learner.

You will learn from anybody, from anywhere, in any circumstance. So, you must be open to constant learning. And you must always upskill your knowledge about the job.

Journalism is fast-changing, so you need to develop the capacity to do journalism of

the current time. You need IT knowledge and to be technology savvy. You'll need to understand how to navigate social media and use it as a resource for your job.

You cannot help but accept artificial intelligence as one of the realities right now. You must have the passion to continue to learn. Then you must be resilient. You must have patience. Journalism will not give you much money, but it can fulfil you. You must really be patient. It must be something you are passionate about. And that's it. A journalist must be a learner. You must develop the grit to continue to learn. And you must have the nose for news. You have no business being here if you don't have all or some of these qualities.

Are there any anniversary messages for our readers, partners, advertisers, and other stakeholders?

It's been 50 years of robust journalism, as we say here. And for us, we are grateful. Some newspapers also started when *PUNCH* started, some came along the line. Some came just a few years back, but many have fizzled out. That we are still standing here after 50 years is a testament to the grace of God upon the company and a reflection of the effort made by our leaders, managers, past editors, and those of us who are still here.

We are grateful to God for that. And, of course, for our readers, we appreciate them. And for our stakeholders, we appreciate them; because without them, there wouldn't be us. If you have a good newspaper that people are not buying, and you're not coming to our website, what are we doing? So, we appreciate our readers. We thank them for their loyalty over the years.

Our advertisers, the advertising agencies, the media buyers, the vendors who also circulate our papers through the nook and cranny of the country, our suppliers, the contacts and sources who also give us stories, our host communities, and even our critics, people who don't just like the idea of *PUNCH* being the biggest Nigerian newspaper, and they just come for you at every point in time; we also thank them because they help us get better. When I know somebody is waiting to castigate me, castigate my newspaper, and rubbish my work, I will do my best. So, we thank all of them.

Above all, we cannot help but thank our journalists. What editor are you if you don't have journalists to get you the stories? So, for our journalists, we consider them as supermen; we hail all of them. We wish everyone a happy 50th anniversary, and to our stakeholders, we promise always to do better.



IT'S TOUGH. JOURNALISM IS A VERY DEMANDING JOB. IT TAKES AWAY A WHOLE LOT OF THINGS FROM YOU. BUT IT IS YOUR DUTY TO MAINTAIN A STRONG WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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You don't need a godfather to excel in PUNCH

— *Emeritus MD, Osinubi*

Former Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of PUNCH Nigeria Limited, Mr. Ademola Osinubi, in this interview with PUNCHERS, shares his thoughts on journalism, management, and life. He also opens up on his early years in the profession, how he rose through the ranks, and how PUNCH survived the military era. Osinubi is a lawyer and a fellow of the Nigerian Guild of Editors

FIRST, we would like to thank you and the management for supporting the idea of an in-house magazine, PUNCHERS. Why did you throw your weight behind this publication?

The objective is to provide an opportunity for the employees to interact more, not essentially at a formal level but at an informal level. It's not a new thing, and I am aware that other organisations also have in-house journals providing the same platform for members of staff to interact beyond official matters. Essentially, it is a good idea, though a little late. Life is not all about work. When you work in a place, it is good that you know the people you are working with.

Talk about knowing ourselves, some employees, especially those employed recently, don't know you beyond the fact that you were the former managing director and editor-in-chief.

Can you please let us into your career progression, starting from your days as a reporter?

Your story will offer lessons to staff and inspire them.

Essentially, I started as a reporter just like you, and I enjoyed my days as a reporter. I moved from there to different levels. I covered a lot of beats. I was the first aviation reporter of *The PUNCH*. I also covered politics, the National Assembly, (electoral) campaigns, and other important issues. Later, I became a news editor, then deputy editor, and then the editor of *The PUNCH*. At a point, I edited all three titles at the same time: *The PUNCH*, *Saturday PUNCH*, and *Sunday PUNCH*. It was under my editorship that we carved out *Saturday PUNCH* and gave it its own identity. However, *Sunday PUNCH* had existed long before then; it is the forerunner. Our first newspaper was a weekly (Sunday) paper until the paper went daily on November 1, 1976. Thereafter, in the wisdom of the Board of Directors, I was taken away from my very active reporting days and pushed up. I became the general manager and, later, the managing director and editor-in-chief of the company. I edited these PUNCH titles between 1988 and 1992. Between 1992 and 1994, I was general manager and editor-in-chief. In 1995, I became the managing director. I have worked in all three headquarters offices. I started out in the old PUNCH building at Onipetesi, which was a makeshift wooden warehouse; then, we moved to the PUNCH office opposite (the old building) and then here, PUNCH Place. We moved here in 2008, although not all of us moved initially. We started producing here in 2008, and the entire workforce moved in on October 12, 2009. By next year (2019), we will be 10 years here.

Have you worked anywhere else?

I worked for six months in Nigerian Tribune, Ibadan, before proceeding to the NIJ for formal journalism training. I also had vacation jobs in Daily Times. But I have always been a PUNCH person all my life.

What is the secret of your long and successful stay in PUNCH?

No human being is perfect. However, I believe so much in discipline. I believe that you can't make progress anywhere without first having personal discipline. Being level-headed is also a major form of discipline.

Once you can have all these, coupled with the right

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF PUNCH OFFERS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONOUR ITS RESILIENT LEGACY AMIDST THE HARSH ECONOMIC REALITIES FACING THE PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY TODAY

upbringing and what you picked from your environment when you were growing up, you will be duly prepared to face the challenges. Challenges will come your way, though, and in different forms. It is for you to be able to decide what you want for yourself and commit your energy to it.

I also believe strongly in the creed of my Christian faith that says, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good work and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' It is not for you to just pray. You must work hard also. If you pray without work, you won't get results. But if you can have some measure of discipline and self-control, if you have an idea of what order and orderliness are all about and you are committed to what you are doing, everything will go well.

I didn't come into journalism by accident. I also made up my mind to stay here (PUNCH). Even when we had our bad times in PUNCH (during the era of military dictatorship), I chose to be here. I was offered employment by almost all the newspapers in Nigeria. In the case of *The Guardian*, I had three offers of employment I was just giving them excuses not to leave *The PUNCH*. *The Guardian* sent me a letter of employment without an interview based on my reputation and work output. I said that was not normal; if you want me to work with you, the least you can do is to call me for a chat to discuss my salary. They said if it was about salary, there was no problem. Then they asked how much I wanted. When they didn't get a response from me, they brought another one (letter).

We had our bad times here. At the time, it seemed very stupid not to have jumped ship. So many of our colleagues jumped ship at that time, but it was a choice, and I respect



• Osinubi

that. I stayed because I enjoyed working in PUNCH. Of course, it was not because PUNCH was not having troubles.

There was a time PUNCH owed its staff salaries for about four months. I had commitments, but I shunned brown envelopes. Somehow, people around me like my wife and family members supported me.

When things became very tough, I turned my car, a Toyota Corolla, into a kabu kabu (unregistered taxi). When I tell people the story, they usually find it very difficult to believe. I operated kabu kabu in Lagos for a while. I would take off from Palmgrove and drive down to Ikeja. There was no bridge then. It was just the hospital and the roundabout. From Ikeja to Ojuelegba, I would do about four runs in the night before going home. I was doing my runs at night so that people would not recognise me. I wore a fez cap to cover my face and I was making money from it.

I used to go home at about 10 pm so that I could quickly put some money together.

PUNCH has been very supportive, but the essential cue is taken from my faith, my upbringing, things I learned while growing up, commitment, and the people I work with.

When you are lucky to work with a person like Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, whom I started working with when he became the chairman of the board made up of experienced people like Dr Lekan Are and Ms Lola Ibi Aboderin, you draw from their experiences and life lessons. We were just growing but we were learning, and we were passionate about our work.

Then again, you realise that some people are also looking up to you, wanting to learn from your life as well.

Do you have any moment you will describe as your most exciting or fulfilling time in PUNCH?

As a journalist, my most fulfilling moments were my days as the news editor of *The PUNCH*. As a news editor, I had more control over editorial staff than the editor. That was the kind of news editor that I was. I wasn't like the commander-in-chief, but I was the brigade commander. And we were a formidable brigade. As the news editor,

before the editor came around, I had sorted out all the pages. I was in full control of the entire news operations. We also had a good time together. We ate together and had our weekend runs. My car was always available for party runs and all that.

I had the best of music set in town then, and each time there was a new album, I would buy two sets; one for parties, one for my house. When I became the editor, I was still active in the newsroom but I became more and more active in management.

Initially, I thought I wasn't cut out for such but somehow somebody had to get the job done.

How do you manage your social life despite your tight schedule?

The social life was a part of the job. You can not separate the two. As a reporter, you need a social life to be able to build the right network of contacts. Of course, things have changed as you can have contacts without meeting people one-on-one, but you still need a social life and good networking skills.

Kindly recall your most challenging moment in PUNCH?

Of course, there were so many, especially during the period we were under the military, what i called military terrorism. Our country was taken hostage by military terrorists. We had come under terrorism in Nigeria by people who were funded by our own money, our taxes, and our resources. Of course, one could understand what was going on then; the military culture of command and control. The commander-in-chief was superior, and they saw the rest of us as bloody civilians. But the hard times have always brought out the best in us. When people say we are proud, arrogant, and all sorts, i hear all those things, and i am happy to hear them because we are not reckoned as one of them.

In anything you do, you must stand out and let people know you for what you stand for. I understand where they are coming from. I understand that people don't like it when you stand up to them or when you stand up to defend certain principles. And that is why we are not making so much progress in this part of the world.

Those were part of the challenges. The military came and shut us down. They did all sorts of things, including an attempt on the life of our chairman, then, Chief Ogunshola. Our editors were detained at various times and periods. When we returned, we returned with fuller fury and fuller force. We were shut down for three months under Gen Ibrahim Babangida and another six months under the same government.

Then, we had the one of 18 months under Gen Sani Abacha. As a matter of fact, when Babangida was leaving in 1993, PUNCH was still shut down because he did not remember to reopen it.

Incidentally, it was the man who re-opened it, who also shut it for 18 months. That was the most challenging moment for us. It was a period when some of our staff were laid off gradually, using the instrument of leave. If you had accumulated leave days, you were allowed to remain in employment until the end of your leave days. It wasn't because the company did not want to keep them anymore, but circumstances were such that the business of the company had been frustrated. So, we had to take that decision so the company would not remain in debt and that was very smart of Chief Ogunshola, our chairman, then. But a few of us, about 15 or 20, I can't recall the exact figure that was retained, such that anytime PUNCH was reopened, we formed the nucleus of the team that restarted our operations. People were brought back in batches, but during that period, some of those who were laid off had secured employment elsewhere. I am glad we went through that phase because it made us stronger.

What are your expectations from an average employee in terms of character and attitude?

My expectations? Well, I expect every employee to do their best, excel, make career progression, just like I have done, and find fulfilment. I don't belong to the Aboderin family, and I had a career progression from a reporter to the MD. I am not related to them in the remotest form. I am from Ijebu, and the Aboderin are from Ibadan.

When I was coming to PUNCH, I didn't know anybody, there was an advert and I applied. I was invited for an interview, and about 48 or 50 of us took the test, seven of us were employed. And from there to this level, there is no cronyism at all. I had no godfather here, so to speak. Some people must have seen the quality of my work and the input and felt that they could entrust the company in my hand and thank God, I did not betray the confidence they had in me. If I did, I would have been kicked out or shown the gate.

What were the lessons you learnt from the challenges you faced?

Do not take things for granted, and when things are going smoothly for you, that is the appropriate time to prepare yourself for the worst thing that can happen. In all circumstances, look at what is going on around you and take a cue from it. After all, there are many great organisations that are no more. Draw the appropriate lessons from their stories. I have held on to one belief over the years that if you do not learn from people's situations and circumstances, others will learn from yours. So, when things happen to people, sit back and imagine what if that happens to me? How will I react to it? This will help you to appreciate the person's position more because no one is insulated from negative occurrences. Yes, you may be smart. You may know how to manage yourself and stay out of trouble, but you must know that anything can happen. But when you're prepared and such things happen, you are not taken aback, and the surprise or shock will not be overwhelming.

It is till early in the new year, but the economic situation is tough. People, including PUNCH's employees, have prayed that God should grant them favours (promotion, salary increase etc.) in their workplaces in the new year.

Will PUNCH workers' prayers be heard this New Year?

It is not as if we have taken a decision not to promote staff. If we want to be fair to the company,



• Osinubi

we will agree that we've been promoting our staff every year but strictly on the basis of merit. We have promoted a lot of people over the years, and I can mention names.

One thing that has emerged over the years is this attitude of some people, who are influenced by the civil service mentality, that promotion should be automatic and based solely on the number of years of service.

I, particularly, have made my position known to my colleagues; this is a private initiative, and we can not continue to determine promotion based on the number of years of service. It is not the sole criterion as there are many other things to be considered. Promotion is primarily performance-based. A few examples.

The former Editor of *The PUNCH*, Mr Martin Ayankola, for instance, joined PUNCH as a chief correspondent (business) and rose to become an editor in less than five years. The Managing Director, Mr Adeyeye Joseph, also has a similar story. If not even faster. He rose to become the editor of *Saturday PUNCH* in less than five years, and then became the editor of *The PUNCH*, rose to become a controller, and now he is the managing director. It is not because they had people that favoured them. It is basically about performance. So, when people begin to say they have spent so and so number of years and have not been promoted, I just wonder. You should even be happy that you have not been kicked out if you have spent so long without earning a promotion. It means your performance is not at its best. PUNCH has a culture of its own, and it is its DNA. This is what we do and it has always worked for us.

Any company that does not see promotion as a reward for outstanding performance is going to be in trouble. You can't be moving people based on who has spent what number of years. Of course, your salaries will be increased, but when you get to the end of your grade, then you can't move again. So you will have to either improve your performance or at some point in time, the system will ask you to leave.

So, it is not as if we have not been promoting people. Last year, over 40 people were promoted, and the year before, about double that number of staff were also promoted. Last year, we also increased everyone's salaries in spite of the not too healthy economic circumstances.

I am sure you are aware that we have a board that is very interested in the welfare of our staff. Some of these matters are discussed at the board level. When we were in very good times, we appreciated our employees very well and more than we do in normal times. At a point, we used to give the winner of the Employee of the Year award a brand new car, but the issue of sustainability later came up. How do we sustain buying a car for an employee every year with the current economic situation? We have to be certain that we can sustain our current level of emoluments.

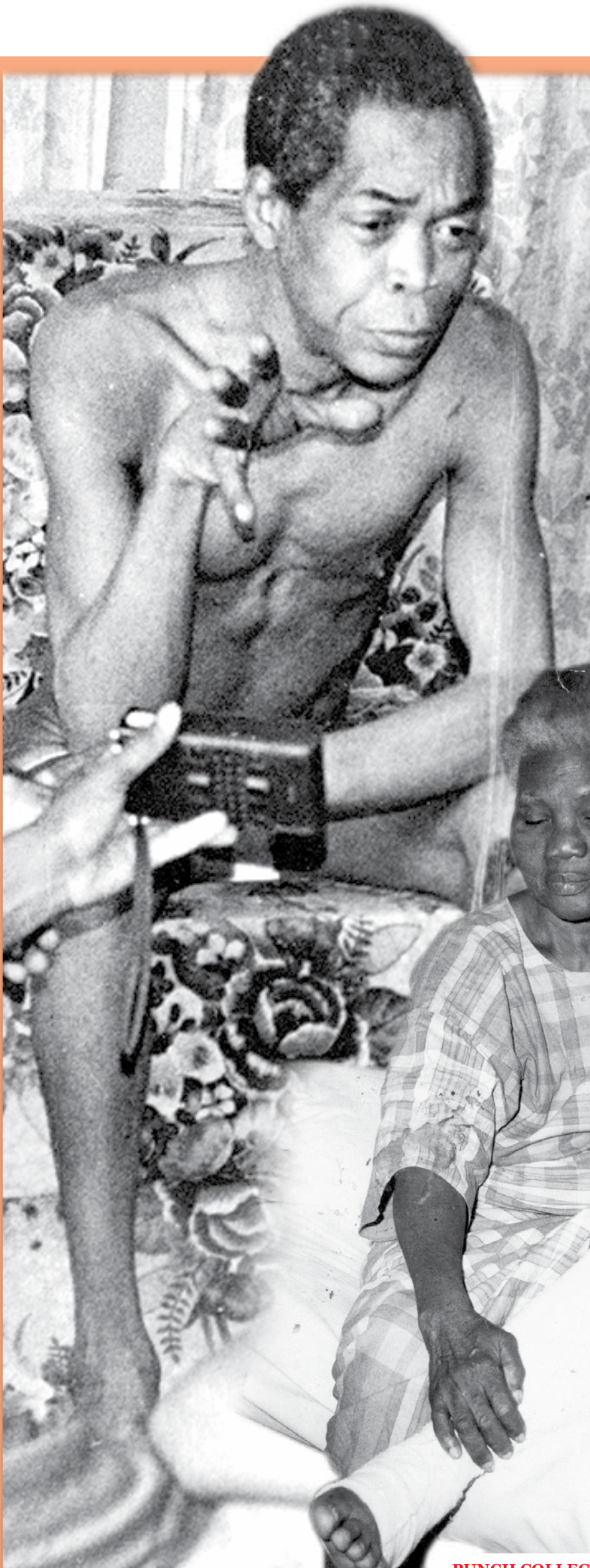
What New Year/Anniversary message do you have for the staff?

Very tough times are still with us and things may get tougher in the New Year. The same situation the economy found itself in about five or six years ago is still there. There hasn't been a dramatic improvement in the economy. So, that has also affected revenue and earnings.

However, the 26th of every month, has not failed in the last 20 years and it is not about to fail now. It can come earlier, but it will never be later. If the 26th of a month falls on a Sunday, we always find a way to pay on the Friday before.

We really need a lot of financial engineering to be able to balance our business. If we do not do that and fail to think ahead, then we will find out that we have not been able to live up to our statutory responsibility as an employer.

It is not so much about what anybody is able to do alone; rather, it is more of what we can achieve collectively. We will not fold our arms expecting the worst. No, we are also fully prepared, given the experience that this company has had over the years and the cumulative years of experience acquired by its management team and a proactive and responsive board we will stay afloat.



PUNCH COLLECTIONS: FELA



• Dr (Mrs) Anikulapo Kuti with Mr. T Kehinde



Poisonous ponmo: How Lagos traders sell plastic pellets to unsuspecting Nigerians



•A processor roasting ponmo with tyres

DEJI LAMBO investigates roasting of cow skin, popularly known as ponmo by processors in Lagos markets, who use tyres, plastics and disused engine oil thereby exposing millions of Nigerians who consume cowhide to toxic chemicals reportedly capable of causing serious health conditions like cancer and sudden deaths.

It was a frightening, haunting sight. Piles of ponmo, a very popular meat savoured by millions of Nigerians, sat on a local open oven. Beneath the ponmo, a dark, smoky fire fuelled with pieces of tyre and plastic burnt the cowhide slowly.

A small group of chattering men stood by the fire dousing the ponmo, intermittently, with a blackish oil. The fire and smoke from the burning plastic, tyre and oil rose into the sky, blackening the early morning air and filling nostrils with soot.

"I roast cowhides very fast, just buy it and give it to me, I don't waste time," one of the men, a thickset man wearing a short and blue armless T-shirt said. Other men stood around him keeping a watchful eye on the roasting ponmo.

These men are ponmo processors. They were preparing the ponmo for the hordes of traders that contracted them to do the illicit trade. These traders would soon hit the markets with the poisonous cow skin for onward delivery to the food sellers, traders and families who come to the market daily



•One of the tyre suppliers

to buy 'fresh' ponmo.

Most of the unsuspecting buyers and eaters of ponmo do not know that their ponmo is burnt with dangerous items that have been linked to cancer and other deadly health conditions. They simply buy, take their pieces home and cook them without knowing that their 'delicious' cowhide is seasoned with a deadly cocktail of carcinogenic substances.

However, if the unsuspecting buyers do not know that the cow skins that they buy and consume are agents of cancer and death, the processors and traders are aware that they are involved in a deadly trade.

Starting from July, our reporter went around the major ponmo markets and slaughterhouses in Lagos, observing ponmo processing, interviewing unsuspecting ponmo sellers and processors and gathering overwhelming evidence about the sneaky, evil trade that unscrupulous ponmo processors carry out at the back of expansive slaughterhouses in the state, far away from prying eyes.

After paying preliminary visits and observing all that these ponmo processors did to keep their business secret, our correspondent decided to disguise as a university student researcher to gain access to their operational base where ponmo is processed with plastic, tyres and a black oil substance that some people say was used engine oil.

Our correspondent disguised as a student when visited several abattoirs in the Ikorodu Local Government Area; Agege Local Government Area; Barracks and Ijanikin abattoirs in the Ojo Local Government Area; private ponmo processing factories on a wetland in the Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education and the Iba Local Council Development Area.

Cheap protein

Ponmo or Awo, as it is commonly known in all parts of Nigeria is a cheap protein source sourced from cowhide. Although there are arguments that this part of meat has little or no nutritional value, it is very popular in Nigeria, especially among the poor.

At most canteens in Nigeria, or Bukas as they are popularly called, ponmo is often the cheapest and the most available protein source. Other meat and fish types sell for

higher prices.

Mrs Efe Okoro, who runs a Buka in the Iba area of the state, says ponmo is the favourite meat bought by her customers.

"My customers like ponmo more than meat," she said, while she was busy attending to customers, including our correspondent, who were buying rice, beans, noodles and ponmo.

"I don't buy more ponmo than meat because I have to wash ponmo, meat is easier to wash, but it normally finishes before meat."

Mike Adeyemi, an electrician in Ikorodu, says he buys ponmo because it is affordable for his family.

"Ponmo is very affordable and cheap. I have a family of eight and just N300 ponmo is enough to cook soup to feed my family. It is cheaper than meat and fish.

"Although people do say poverty is what will make you think eating ponmo is OK, but I don't mind since it is what I can afford to satisfy my family. I also eat red meat," he said.

Ope Falade, a homemaker, who cooks ponmo for her family, said she liked to buy ponmo because it was cheap and her family enjoyed it.

"My children like ponmo a lot, and it is very cheap. I buy meat and fish, but our meals are not complete without ponmo," the mother of three said.

However, it won't be entirely correct to describe ponmo as the meat of the poor. Healthy living is gaining popularity and awareness in Nigeria. As a result, many people who are worried about the probable health complications associated with the consumption of red meat, have resorted to ponmo as a reliable alternative.

With a growing population of over 213 million Nigerians, there exists an almost insatiable demand for ponmo among the populace.

Our investigations show that the huge demand for ponmo is one of the major factors driving the dangerous processing practices in Lagos markets.

During our correspondent's investigations, he found a few places where ponmo is processed with firewood, which experts say is also a dangerous contaminant but less dangerous than plastic, engine oil and tyres.

Disused tyres are a common sight in Lagos. People simply throw them away on the streets or deposit them at vulcanizer shops when they are no longer useful. Used engine oil is mostly emptied into streets or gutters when cars are serviced and their oil is changed.

As for plastic, it is very common in waste dumps and plastic manufacturing or recycling factories. All of these provide opportunities for unscrupulous ponmo processors and sellers seeking to cut corners for gain.

Ponmo: the making

Ponmo is usually produced in public slaughterhouses and other private abattoirs across the country. In Lagos, the slaughterhouses are regulated and said to be regularly inspected by government agencies and officials.

There are two types of ponmo: white and brown, and their production processes differ.

A ponmo processor in a slaughterhouse around Ebute, Ikorodu, Sherifat Lawal, described the process to our correspondent. Ponmo, according to her, is processed in two ways: through boiling and roasting. She added that brown ponmo is prepared by roasting cowhide, white ponmo is processed by boiling.

She said, "The making of the white ponmo is done by using a sharp object to scrape the hair on the cowhide. Afterwards, we will put the cowhide inside a pot, add water and boil it to make it soft. That is white ponmo.

"The brown ponmo is achieved through roasting with fire. We set firewood on fire and place a net-like iron on the lit firewood. Without scraping the hair on the cow's skin, we place it on the iron and roast it for about 30 minutes to remove the hair.

"Afterwards, we then boil it for some minutes and soak in a pot of water for about 13 hours to remove all the germs. We do the soaking overnight. In the morning, we will remove it, use a sponge to wash it with only water and supply it to our customers, who will cut it into smaller pieces for consumption after cooking."

Our correspondent observed these stages of processing ponmo in all the slaughterhouses that he visited.

Armed with prior information, however, he felt there was more than meets the eye in Lawal's narrative of how brown ponmo is made.

While walking around the market, our correspondent



•A processor roasting ponmo with shoes

cow-skin meat roasted with tyres,



• A man roasting pommo with plastic pellets

noticed that most of the brown pommo processing spots in the markets did not have firewood stacked near the open ovens.

Rather than firewood, our correspondent sighted scrap tyres, pieces of plastic, old shoes and cans of oil – that were said to be engine oil, a claim which the reporter could not confirm. In Lagos markets, the ground plastic pieces are known as Jamanca.

Some of the markets where our correspondent observed the use of these dangerous fuel sources for processing pommo were Agege, Barracks, Ijanikin abattoirs, including the private pommo processing factories in the Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education (AOCOED) and Iba LCDA, among others.

To ensure that their operations were kept from prying eyes, most of the pommo processors prevented any form of pictures or video recordings and were quick to question strangers or anyone seen moving aimlessly around the premises.

We roast pommo with tyres – processor

When this reporter visited the private pommo processing facility at Check Point Bus Stop around the AOCOED, the reporter observed a pommo processor, Anu Sunday, processing cowhide into brown pommo. She used scrap tyres to fuel the fire roasting the raw cowhide.

Intermittently, Sunday was also seen using a bowl to scoop a black watery oily substance from a bucket and pouring the same on the burning tyre roasting the cowhide.

The expectant mother, who was employed by the owner of the processing facility, Bose Ajibade, aka Iya Ibeji, used no fewer than 10 tyres to roast five complete cowhides.

Asked why she refused to wear a nose mask to prevent inhalation of the heavy smoke emitting from the open oven, Sunday said, "I am used to burning it without covering my nose. If there is not much work, I do get paid N1,500, but I get more if the work is plenty. I have roasted about five complete cowskins with tyres today."

As Anu finished roasting each piece of cowhide, a pommo trader, who gave her name as Florence picked up the fresh brown pommo, cut it into pieces and transferred them to her daughter, Kehinde, who was seen splitting spilt shoes as fuel for another fire. The shoes include leather shoes, plastic shoes and rubber shoes.

We use shoes to roast pommo for profit

Our correspondent asked Kehinde, dressed in a red gown, why she roasted the pommo after the initial roasting with tyres?

"What we are looking for is our gain. If we do not remove the hair, we will have to cut those parts away and it means we are cutting away our gain. So, we have to re-roast it with shoes to remove the hair completely.

"If you use shoes to roast the cowskin from the beginning, it won't roast properly because the fire is not heavy and that is why they use tyres to start the roasting of the cowhides.

"They use tyres to roast about 100 completely flayed cowskins daily here and we do pay N1,000 per cow skin. They (Sunday and her boss) only help us and other customers to use tyres to roast but we are the ones that re-roast the roasted pommo using shoes.

"The ones she (Sunday) roasted with tyres still have hair on them; I am using spilt shoes to roast it again to remove the hair completely and to make the pommo neat to attract patronage in the market," the graduate said.

When Kehinde was done, the reporter purchased two pieces of pommo.

Unexpected twist

Before his encounter with Kehinde and her mother, our correspondent had visited Ajibade's facility three days earlier to meet her but was told that she was sick and couldn't come

to work because of her condition.

Other traders and businessmen selling outside the premises of the facility said she was likely to resume on Monday and advised the reporter to check back.

Before leaving the place, our correspondent moved around a bit and found stacks of disused shoes, scrap tyres, plastic kegs stored underneath a makeshift shed.

An imported raw cowhide immersed in salt for preservation was also seen among the collection of stored materials. A blackish stain was visible on Sunday's face and clothes as brownish stains littered the premises where the roasting usually took place.

The brownish stains were from the remnants of the thin iron wires in the scrap tyres used to roast the pommo. The waste of burnt metals is usually packed in sacks and sold to scrap buyers.

Unknown to our correspondent, his observational strolls and unapproved facility tour had attracted the suspicion of the traders and businessmen around the premises. Some of them alerted Ajibade that someone was snooping around her facility. But our correspondent's encounter with her wouldn't happen on that day.

Our correspondent returned to the facility a few days later. He met Sunday, Kehinde and Florence processing pommo at the wetland. As he made his way out of the facility after buying some pommo off Florence, a woman who was waiting at the entry point of the processing facility beckoned on him.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" "I am an undergraduate conducting research on how to make pommo."

"Where is your school Identification Card?" "Are you Ajibade, aka Iya Ibeji (the owner of the facility)?"

The woman ignored the question and repeated her question with some sternness this time.

"I am asking if you are Ajibade because I have been coming here for the past three days but the people I met said Ajibade was sick but that she would come today. When I got here, I asked after her and was told she's not around," the reporter said.

"If people come from Alausa and discover I use tyres to make pommo, they will say I want to kill people. I was informed that you came three days ago, but where is your ID card?"

At this point, the argument had attracted the traders and businessmen who quickly gathered around the reporter accusing him of sneaking into the facility.

The crowd looked upset. As the tension heightened, our correspondent knew he needed to act fast to deter the angry mob from assaulting him. He dipped his hand into his pocket, exhibited some pretentious reluctance and brought out his fake ID card.

He handed it to Ajibade who vetted it, returned the

card and allowed the reporter to leave the premises. As the reporter walked out of the premises he looked back and saw doubts on the faces of some members of the angry crowd and quickened his steps.

We roast pommo with plastics - processor

At the Barracks Abattoir along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway, a pommo processor, Sodiq Ogunmola, affirmed using only plastic to roast cowhides to produce pommo. But right there and then, his female colleagues were seen using a combination of tyres, sticks and plastics to roast the cowhides.

When asked why they added tyres, Ogunmola said, "They just used it to light the fire," but our correspondent observed the rubber of the scrap tyres, placed directly under the pommo, melting into flames and roasting the cow's skin till only tiny wires of irons were left in the open oven.

Also, the wall of the pommo section in the abattoir was filled with black patches, tell-tale signs left behind by the constant smoke emitting from the tyres used in roasting the cowhides.

Ogunmola said, "What we use in making the fire is sticks and pieces of plastics; we only use tyres to start the fire. But the tyres usually make the pommo turn black and that is why we hardly recommend it.

"After roasting the back of the cowhide for some minutes, we will roll the cowhide and change it to the other side and also roast it. We roast one pommo for about 30 minutes. Afterwards, we will boil it inside hot water for about an hour to make it soft, we will then cut it into smaller pieces and immerse it inside ordinary water till the next day.

"From then, it is ready for eating. The plastics make the fire burn very well and we sometimes usually purchase it somewhere opposite the barracks."

Tyres, plastics suppliers

Our correspondent traced one of the plastic suppliers, Abdulkadir Baba, to his base opposite the abattoir barracks and he confirmed selling a sack of plastics for N100 per kilogram to the pommo processors at Barracks Abattoir.

"I don't select the plastics, they just come, select the plastics they need and put it inside an empty sack. After the sack is filled, I will weigh the kilogram. I sell one kilogram for N100. They use the plastic when roasting the pommo with fire," the father of three said.

Around the same vicinity, our correspondent found Abdulkabir Isa, who supplies tyres to the pommo processors. He said patronage from pommo processors at the abattoir barracks usually started around 7 am.

He said, "I just went to get these tyres today. I supply tyres to the abattoir at Barracks and I sell each tyre for N100. Around 7am, those who usually roast pommo in the slaughterhouse will come to my place to buy the tyres."

No reference standard to run test –NAFDAC

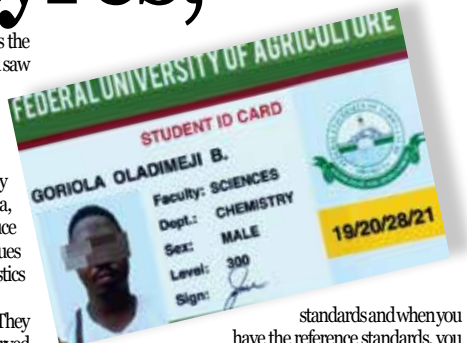
In the course of his investigation, the reporter approached the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control to run an analysis on the pommo samples to determine the degree of danger that Lagos' perilous pommo poses to consumers.

The Director, NAFDAC Food Laboratory in the Oshodi area of the state, Dr Charles Nwachukwu, told our correspondent to return three days later for further deliberations on the test.

Upon his return, Dr Nwachukwu introduced the reporter to one of the agency's lead analysts who said the agency had no reference standards to run the analysis.

The analyst said, "The analysis is for Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons. But the challenge presently is the (unavailability of the) reference standards. There is no way we can do the test without the reference standards.

"What you are looking for is called PAHs, and there are about 15 European Union priority PAHs that we will look at while doing the analysis. So, you need to get those 15 major



standards and when you have the reference standards, you run them alongside the samples.

"But the present challenge is that we have not even got the reference standards."

Asked how long it would take to get the reference standards, the analyst said, "Mine is to submit the list, but it is the management that connects with the suppliers."

This reporter later met with Dr Nwachukwu, who affirmed the analyst's narrative. He revealed that the agency was yet to take delivery of the reference standards it purchased.

"We have not received reference standards; we run it (sample) with reference standards. We have paid for it. It (test) is not something we cannot do," Nwachukwu said.

Nigeria's testing standard for pommo is still being developed –SON

Bent on using a government facility to run the analysis, the reporter visited the Standards Organisation of Nigeria in the Ogba area of the state.

There, the Director, Laboratory Services, SON, Dr Barth Ugwu, said there was no standard for pommo testing in the country, adding that the standard was still being developed.

He said, "The standard is our working guide; it is the technical document which we have to use to benchmark the analysis. You cannot start going for a test for a product that has no standard. Standards cover every facet of life, both tangible and intangible products.

"The standard for pommo is being developed and there is a process for standard development. You, first of all, identify the need for it and you assign it to a project officer who will do the preliminary gathering of data; do a test, and then all stakeholders who are involved in it will meet and deliberate on the standard using all manners of available data.

"We will have an internal first meeting which is a working group; then the second one is general which involves everybody that is involved in pommo in the country. We will call them together and deliberate on it. After that, it goes for approval at the highest standards body and once it is approved, it becomes binding on people to abide by the standards."

However, the implication of the lack of standards for pommo in the country is that the entire pommo processed and eaten by Nigerian consumers daily is unregulated.

Experts say pommo that is processed with burning tyres and plastic are likely to be exposed to toxic chemicals, including carcinogenic heavy metals.

A Professor of Chemistry, Lagos State University, Rasaq Olowu, said chemicals emitting from the burning of tyres and plastics fueling the roasting of pommo are carcinogenic.

Olowu said, "Burning of tyres is hazardous to health as it involves emission of toxic chemicals that can lead to cancer and irritation of skin. Burning of pommo with tyres and plastics will lead to the release of a large number of PAHs, which are toxic to the system and usually affects the central nervous system that makes one die gradually."

Reacting to pommo processors' lack of use of nose masks during processing, Olowu said, "Inhaling toxic chemicals will definitely affect the body system and because they (pommo processors) don't have the knowledge of what they are inhaling, they don't use any protective measures.

"But if they know the health implication of what they are inhaling, they will discover that they are reducing their life span bit by bit because those chemicals they inhale increase the rate at which they can have cancer."

A Professor of Microbiology, LASU, Kabiru Akinyemi, said, "Relevant agencies like NAFDAC should be saddled with such responsibility of ensuring that the processes and the people perpetrating such act are brought to book and sensitised to expose them to the dangers associated with consuming pommo that is prepared through such processes.

"It is clear that when you burn tyres, definitely they will emit chemicals. Pommo is flesh and has some composition that will react with the chemicals released by burning the tyres and plastics, and eventually cause delirious effects to the consumers that may precipitate cancer, react with free radicals in the body and may eventually cause some respiratory or nervous disorder."

Studies have shown that when these metals accumulate in the human body they trigger terminal illnesses that lead to untimely death.

Pommo processed and eaten by Nigerian consumers daily is unregulated

Experts say Pommo that is processed with:
 Burning tyres
 Burning plastic
 are likely to be exposed to toxic chemicals, including carcinogenic heavy metals.

Studies have shown that accumulation of **Carcinogenic heavy metals** in the human body trigger terminal illnesses that can lead to **untimely death.**

GRAPHER: JOSEPH GAZA

The rich also cry: Killer

ON any weekday, the air over Universal Steels is certain to be thick with sooty fumes. These fumes are at the centre of a dispute that has pitted the company against the residents of an upscale estate in the heart of Lagos.

Residents of Adekunle Fajuyi Estate accuse the company of polluting their homes and environment with the heavy gases emanating from its huge machines. These gases, they add, are also responsible for the high incidence of cancer and respiratory ailments in the estate.

When our correspondent visited the company to get its side of the story, a company representative, Mr. David Igwe, was quick to dismiss the allegations.

Igwe said, "There is nothing like that. It is not true. We have an abatement plant that takes care of the gases we emit. We bought the plant two years ago and the Lagos State government was here during the launch.

"Go to the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency and they will tell you what we have done. We don't pollute the environment and there is no estate that is affected by our operations."

The test

In late November, 16 of the residents agreed to *SUNDAY PUNCH's* request for a series of blood and urine tests that would either validate their allegations or confirm the company's innocence.

The tests were to determine the heavy metal concentrations in the residents' blood systems and ascertain if they were within safe thresholds.

For the tests, researchers from the Department of Biochemistry, College of Medicine, University of Lagos, randomly selected 16 residents who had lived in the estate for a minimum of seven years.

The team got 15 blood samples and 14 urine samples — one of the 16 residents did not give blood, while two declined to submit urine samples. Samples were also taken from borehole water, well water and a coconut from a 15-year-old coconut tree. *SUNDAY PUNCH* paid for the tests.

Killer metals in their blood

At the end of three weeks, the results were ready. The researchers published their findings in a 10-page report. The report showed that the concentrations of chromium, cadmium, zinc and iron in the blood of the residents of Adekunle Fajuyi Estate were much higher than the levels permitted by the World Health Organisation.

The head of the team that conducted the tests, Prof Albert Ebuehi, described the results as "alarming."

He warned that the residents' blood had "heavy metal toxicity" which posed serious health risks.

According to him, the test showed that the urine and blood of the residents were contaminated with chromium, cadmium, zinc and iron.

Ebuehi stated that the highest and lowest values of iron in the plasma of the tested residents were 8,067 per cent and 565 per cent respectively and were higher than the WHO permissible levels.

The cadmium level in the most contaminated resident among those tested was 130,000 per cent greater than the WHO acceptable level. The least contaminated individual had cadmium concentration that was 327 per cent higher than the normal value of 0.0011mg/L.

According to professor, the levels of chromium in the tested residents were also 'alarming.'

The 16 residents also had high zinc toxicity in their plasma. The highest value of zinc was 146 per cent, greater than the permissible level of 1.1mg/L, while the lowest was 7.3 per cent

greater.

The trend was the same with the urine tests. The highest value of iron in urine was 4,963 per cent, greater than the WHO acceptable level while the lowest was 205 per cent.

For cadmium in urine, the highest value was 130,000 per cent, greater than the permissible level of 0.0011mg/L, with the lowest being 46,363 per cent.

The highest value of zinc was 143.6 per cent, higher than the WHO permissible level, while the lowest was 5.5 per cent.

The heavy gas contamination was also extremely high in borehole water, well water and coconut water samples found in Adekunle Fajuyi Estate.

The report stated that, "A final revelation became more glaring when these heavy metals were identified and determined in the coconut grown and harvested within the same vicinity. The metals in the coconut water were abnormally high and unsafe for human consumption.

"Heavy metals could enter coconut water through soil or water contamination. The metals have also affected the quality of the water in the environment. They were detected in heavy quantities."

Killing them softly

Ebuehi, an ordinarily unflappable academic, was so alarmed by the results that he advised residents to "leave the estate as soon as possible."

He said, "They must not eat any fruit grown in the area; all their plants are contaminated because of the pollution of underground water. Already, the offspring of the 16 residents sampled are likely to have the heavy metals too. That may lead to generations of families with toxic metals in their systems. They have to leave that place for their own good."

Speaking on the likely effects of the metals that the residents have inhaled, Ebuehi said, "Inhalation of cadmium-containing fumes can result in metal fume fever, but may progress to chemical pneumonitis, pulmonary oedema and death.

"Also, high levels of free ferrous iron react with peroxides to produce free radicals, which are highly reactive and can damage DNA, proteins, lipids and other cellular components. Excess iron damages the heart, liver and elsewhere and this can lead to coma, metabolic acidosis, shock, liver failure, coagulopathy, respiratory distress syndrome, long-term organ damage and even death.

"Chronic toxicity of zinc may produce gastric ulcer, pancreatitis, anaemia, nausea, vomiting and pulmonary fibrosis. Acute toxicity is manifested as fever and anaemia. Lead was not detected in the test."

'Fatal without treatment'

In 1996, a team of medical scientists in India released the result of a study on the link between metal gases and gall bladder disease and cancer. The study was done over a year on 96 patients with gall bladder diseases at the University Hospital, Varanasi, India.

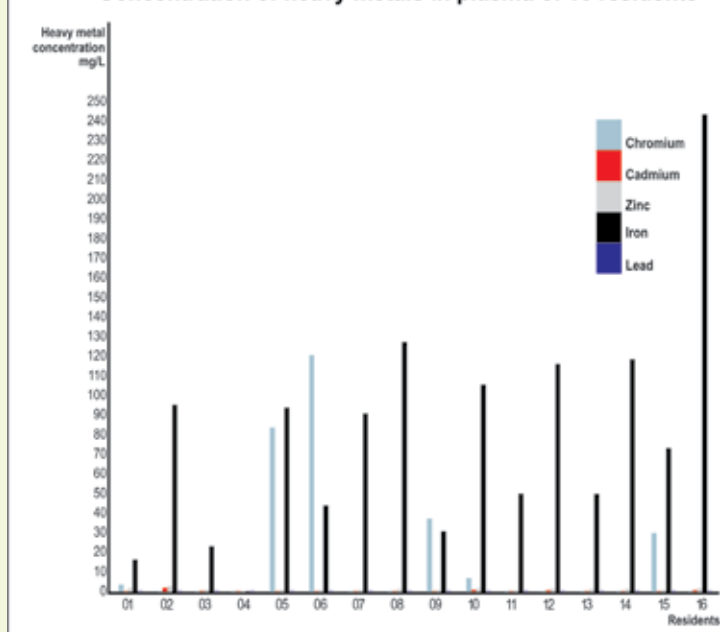
The study concluded that the metal toxicity in the patients was caused by the dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals in drinking water in the regions where the patients lived.

The team leader, Professor V.K. Shukla, wrote that, "The two regions lie down stream of the river Ganges, which is the main source of drinking, bathing, and irrigation water in this part of India and receives untreated domestic sewage and industrial and agricultural effluent.

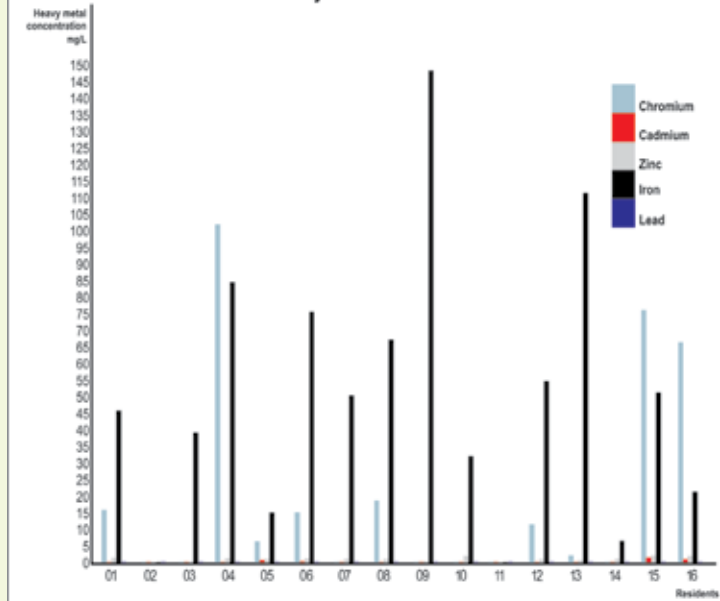
"High concentrations of cadmium have been reported in sewage, irrigation water and vegetables grown in the area; and higher concentrations of heavy metals than recommended by the World Health

In this second part of a three-part series, 16 residents of Adekunle Fajuyi Estate, Universal Steels Limited, revealed heavy

Concentration of heavy metals in plasma of 16 residents



Concentration of heavy metals in urine of 16 residents



Note: WHO permissible level of cadmium is 0.0004-0.0011mg/L; zinc, 0.6- 1.1mg/L; iron, 3mg/L; lead, 0.7 mg/L while chromium has no clear reference

Organisation have been reported in water from this region. Heavy metals as environmental pollutants have been implicated in human carcinogenesis.

"These metals, especially cadmium, are excreted and concentrated in the hepatobiliary system. These metals are known as chemical carcinogens, so the high biliary concentrations of these metals in carcinoma of the gall bladder may be a factor in this cancer."

A consultant surgeon based in Lagos, Dr. Sylvester Ikhisemogie, agreed with this research. According to him, excess cadmium has been linked to both cancer of the urinary bladder and stomach.

He said, "A man who inhales a large dose of cadmium is not in much risk as one who does so in small amounts steadily over many years.

"Because cadmium is so toxic, even minimal exposure to dust can be extremely damaging to the body — the kidneys can shrink up to 30 per cent of their mass. Accumulation of cadmium in the lungs can cause pulmonary oedema. It

is fatal without treatment. In its milder form, cadmium toxicity can cause flu-like symptoms of cough, catarrh conjunctivitis, bronchitis and lung fibrosis. Chronically, excess cadmium causes bone softening (osteomalacia) and bone brittleness (osteoporosis), leading to deep-seated pain and easy fractures."

Ikhisemogie added that high concentrations of zinc can cause muscle cramps, headaches, blurring of vision, severe weakness and convulsions, while chromium causes "different types of bronchitis (severe respiratory disease), asthma, conjunctivitis, passage of blood in stools and lung cancer."

As for iron, he said, "In excess amounts, it accumulates in the liver, which is the organ for detoxification and interferes with its cellular functions so adversely that the liver begins to shrink in a process known as liver chiroisis. This will ultimately poison the organ leading to liver failure, as the majority of its cells have been made abnormal by the presence of excessive iron."



Prof. Ebuehi

metals in the blood

TOYOSI OGUNSEYE reports that medical tests conducted on off Adeniji Jones, Ikeja, Lagos, who are exposed to fumes from metals in their blood, urine and water that could lead to death



•Fumes from Universal Steels. Inset: The company. Photos: Stanley Ogidi

A climatologist, Professor Temiloluwa Ologunorisa, of the Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research, Osun State University, Osogbo, reiterated the opinions of the medical doctors.

According to Ologunorisa, apart from the gases which the residents inhale in dry form, rainfall converts the gases to wet form, which are washed to the ground surface including roof surface.

He said, "The gases undergo some chemical reactions after combining with rain water to form more dangerous substances. Ultimately, some of the gases or substances formed are carcinogenic, and others can cause respiratory ailments."

Another professor of climatology, Olukayode Oladipo, said apart from the heavy metals detected during the research, emissions from the steel company include iron oxides, sulphur oxides, calcium oxides, hydrocarbons, carbonaceous compounds and chlorides.

He said, "It is therefore not surprising that high levels of chromium, cadmium, zinc and iron are found in the people living in the area. It is also not surprising that the water, air and soil around the industrial site have been contaminated with the series of emissions mentioned above."

"Operations of the industry must have some local effects on the thermal conditions (temperature) of the local environment. It will be interesting to find out if the temperature conditions around the steel company is higher than the surrounding environment to generate what we call urban heat island."

Living in denial

When our correspondent told Igwe that there was evidence of the pollution from the company, he sidestepped the question and retorted, "We know how we settle journalists."

He then left in a hurry, after promising to give the reporter another appointment.

A subsequent text message to Igwe for the promised appointment was not replied. Our correspondent called him again; a man that sounded like Igwe picked the call but claimed it was a wrong number.

"Please, check the number you are calling. You must have a wrong number," he said.

Residents said representatives of the company once told them that the area was mapped as an industrial estate, hence they had no reason to complain.

A resident, Mohammed Yusuf said, "That argument cannot stand. Even if they got here before us, does that mean that they should not be socially responsible? The government gave us approvals to live here as a residential estate. So, they cannot claim that because they were told that it was an industrial estate, they should be killing us gradually with poisonous gases."

"Even in developed countries like America and Britain, people live very close to so many manufacturing industries and these

companies are very responsible. You don't see the companies directing poisonous gases at the residents. They build high chimneys and direct their gases very far into the air. That is possible because they have a responsible government. But it is not the same here."

The Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development, Lagos State, Mr. Toyin Ayinde, said Universal Steels could not excuse polluting the environment on the grounds of physical planning.

He said, "The Ogba area estate has both industrial and residential components and it is not unusual that they are so located. Does a man have a right to operate an industry at the expense of the people who are almost certainly his own clientele? I think not."

"This is where the Lagos State Ministry of the Environment and its agencies have a role to play, for they are the regulatory bodies to ensure that industrial effluent is controlled and environment-friendly."

Drama at LASEPA

The government agency responsible for environmental matters in Lagos is the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency. LASEPA, by law, is expected to monitor, manage and protect the Lagos State environment from all forms of degradation arising from solid, liquid and gaseous waste. The agency is also empowered by



•A researcher collecting blood from a resident

law to arrest persons, seal premises and seize items being used in the perpetuation of any offence.

When our correspondent met the General Manager of LASEPA, Mr. Adebola Shabi, the agency said it was not aware that Universal Steels was polluting the environment.

He said, "We were there two years ago to commission the abatement plant. I always use the company as an example for other manufacturing companies. We shut them down some years ago but after that, they bought the plant to take care of the greenhouse gases they emit. Apart from the harm they cause to humans, these gases deplete the ozone layer and cause climate change. The company takes care of the gases they emit. I am not aware that any person is suffering poor health due to gases from the company."

When *SUNDAY PUNCH* insisted that there was evidence that the company emits gases with high metal concentrations every day apart from Sundays, Shabi raised a four-man team to investigate the allegation.

The following day, our correspondent led the LASEPA team to Adekunle Fajuyi Estate where they took pictures of thick emissions from the company that was settling in peoples' homes. They also spoke to the residents.

After spending some hours in the estate, the team decided to go to Universal Steels to confront its officials with the evidence.

On getting to the company, Igwe was not pleased to see our correspondent with the team.

He said, "Government should not be conniving with the press. LASEPA is a regulatory agency that monitors the environment and I see nothing wrong with the agency paying a visit to the company. But you should not be partnering press while conducting your duties."

At this point, the team asked our correspondent and the photojournalist to excuse the two parties.

Thirty minutes later, Igwe and the LASEPA officials came out and said they were going on a tour of the company's facilities. Igwe said our correspondent and a female member of the team could not go on the tour because they had a pair of sandals on. *SUNDAY PUNCH's* photojournalist was also not allowed on the tour, even though he wore a pair of covered shoes.

When the LASEPA officials and Igwe returned from the tour, the company representative crowded to our reporter. "I have shown LASEPA round, you can ask the agency all you want to know. They will tell you."

On leaving the premises, the team told *SUNDAY PUNCH* that the company said it had only been emitting the gases for about two weeks and that it had bought some equipment to fix its leaking roofs and pipes.

Memorandum without understanding

Three days after the *SUNDAY PUNCH's* visit, residents got an invitation from LASEPA for a meeting with the company on December 3.

At the end of the meeting, both parties signed a memorandum of understanding. A copy of the MoU, which was obtained by our correspondent, stated that Universal Steels agreed to "fix its faulty furnaces, repair its dilapidated roofs, and start a remedial measure."

It also promised to replace the filtration bags of the abatement plant in two weeks and install a hood and blower to filter the emission. It agreed to alert LASEPA within 24 hours of breakdown and be financially responsible for the cost of any remediation work that may need to be done to abate the nuisance and restore the damaged environment.

The steel company promised in the MoU to complete its factory maintenance before the second week of January.

However, a few days after the MoU was signed, the residents told *SUNDAY PUNCH* that Universal Steels was still polluting the air with the poisonous emissions in the middle of the night.



AIR PEACE
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 **LONDON**

COMING SOON

PUNCH remains a model of socially responsible journalism practice

— *Former News Editor, Onabanjo*

Dipo Onabanjo was a class of 1983-1993 who joined PUNCH Newspapers as a pioneer State Correspondent for the old Adamawa State in 1986. In this interview with Adekunle Sulaimon, he shares his experiences covering several beats — including Politics, Judiciary, Business, and Labour, among many others

WHAT was the most memorable story you covered during your time as a journalist with The PUNCH?

As a newsman with a knack for exclusive stories, I covered so many beats - politics, judiciary, business, labour, etc, from where I got many of them. The most memorable one is the story about the defunct National Electoral Commission importing hurricane lanterns for one of the general elections during Babangida's military regime. I was at the NEC headquarters then at the old National Assembly complex at Race Course, Lagos, with other political correspondents when two trailers were led into the premises. I got curious and left the NEC office to know what exactly the trucks carried. Lo and behold! hundreds of cartons of lanterns, which were so labelled! There was not enough space at the office, so security men had to divert the vehicles to the old ECOWAS secretariat nearby. I followed the trucks on foot and joined those trying to unload the cartons. I got my facts and raced to NEC's PRO office for confirmation and balance. 'Go and publish what you saw,' Mr. Tonnie Iredia, the PRO told me, a wry smile on his face. It became *The PUNCH* lead story the next day. My colleagues on the beat were stunned and wondered why I didn't share it with them. Who does that in a do-or-die competition for exclusive stories?

How has journalism evolved over the 50 years since PUNCH was founded, and what do you think the future holds for the industry?

There have been many faces and indeed phases of journalism since PUNCH was founded. In the '50s to '70s, journalism was comparatively new in the country. It was for the dropouts and those who couldn't make it in other professions but who could write good English Language and who were rugged and patriotic enough to engage colonial and military rulers of those days that were in the profession. But in spite of their challenges, many of them did well and raised the banner of their profession. They operated under stressful conditions like low pay, inadequate or lack of relevant tools, inconducive offices, poor management, etc. For instance, when I joined PUNCH in 1986, the newsroom was not fit for human habitation, particularly because of the intense heat due to poor ventilation in the enclosed structure called 'Hollywood' those days. As a state correspondent, I had no office in Yola; no communication gadgets - radio-phone, telephone, or telex facilities.

But things have changed now for the better. With improvement in Information Technology, more communication institutions are spewing forth hundreds of well-baked journalists, the sky is the limit, even with the social media and the challenges they pose in terms of competition. I am aware that PUNCH is one of the high-fliers in the industry now with good pay and better conditions of service. The future looks brighter, provided we learn to adjust to the hurricane of change.

Kindly share any behind-the-scenes anecdotes or experiences from your years in journalism that stand out to you.

They are many. Anecdotes like 'publish and be damned', 'Bread and butter journalism', 'deadlines are deathlines', 'This story smells or is salty/oily,' meaning that the writer has collected 'Brown envelopes' to aid publication were very common those days. During the era of long knives when many were relieved of their jobs in PUNCH those days, the phrases like 'sa bale', 'tayo fun un' (cut him down or shove him out), etc were rife those days.

What role do you believe PUNCH has played in shaping the community or country over the past 50 years?

The PUNCH has always championed the rights of the downtrodden and defended democratic norms and practices even at the risk of its own existence, as it strives to perform its traditional functions of informing, educating and entertaining its diversified audience. It confronted military juntas headlong, got bruised in the process and did not waver. It remains a quintessential model of socially responsible journalism practice always rooting for good governance.

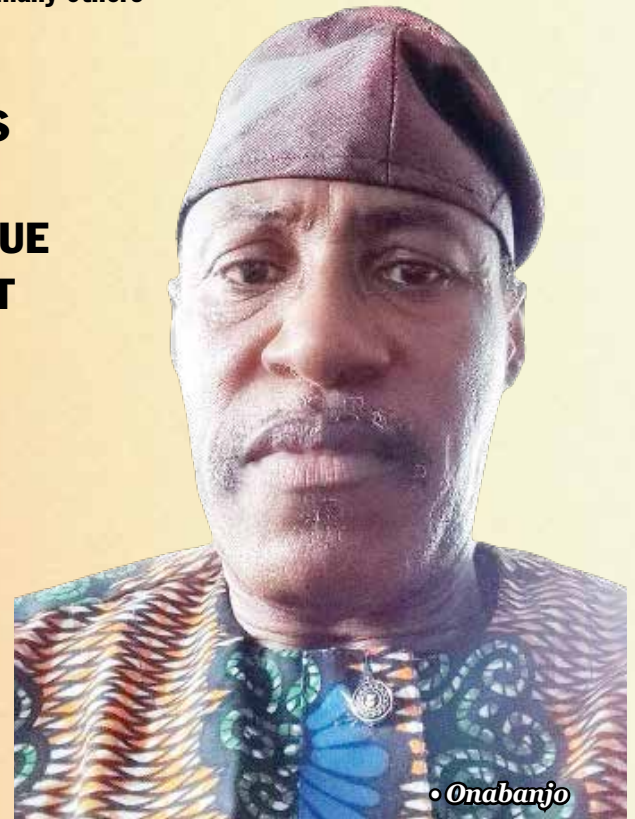
As someone who has witnessed the industry's evolution firsthand, what advice would you give to aspiring journalists today?

Aspiring journalists should first get educationally qualified for the job so that they get to know what they are in for; acquaint themselves with the ethics of the profession, its constitutional relevance, laws of libel and sedition in particular, etc. It is not good to just stumble on the job just because you are able to write good prose. Journalism is far beyond that. You must have a flair for the job and the psychological stamina to do it. You must be able to read wide and cultivate qualities like nose for news, inquisitiveness, integrity, perseverance, patience, and the love to disseminate truth.

What do you consider to be the biggest challenges facing journalism today, and how can media houses like PUNCH address them?

The biggest challenges are inadequate financial resources, poor management of

WHAT SETS PUNCH APART IS A COMBINATION OF INTEGRITY, DUE DILIGENCE, BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES INCLUDING INTENSE PROFIT DRIVE, RESPECT FOR PROFESSIONAL ETHICS, AND DISCIPLINE



• Onabanjo

human and material resources, poor remuneration, job and national insecurity, corruption, poor training and poor reading culture particularly in a society like ours. Media houses must address these challenges frontally by ensuring that media owners raise enough capital to guarantee adequate funding of the industry and proper training of media managers.

There have been too many misfits in media management over the years who manage the media by whims and caprices thus bringing misfortunes to journalists and their careers.

More on-the-job trainings for journalists and media managers to bring them at par with latest developments.

Requirements for media ownership should be more stringent to disallow unserious, corrupt business men who may want to establish media for personal aggrandisement and opaque motives.

Media owners must continue to acquire modern technology to smoothen the production process and make the job less herculean. Professional unions such as NUJ, NGE, RATTAWU, etc, and media-related NGOs must turn their searchlights on media organisations to ensure due diligence, especially in the area of human resources management of the media.

How do you feel about being part of a media house that has reached such a significant milestone, and what does this anniversary mean to you personally?

I feel great. I feel rewarded that all those years of toil, suffering, and smiling did not go to waste. You know, success, as they say, has so many brothers. Thus, the anniversary is a big plus for me. I can beat my chest now and crow that I was part of the success!

What do you hope the legacy of our media house will be as it moves into its next chapter?

The legacy of a big dream fulfilled; of dignity justified; of hope raised should continue to drive the next chapter of this great media giant no matter the odds.

In your opinion, what sets PUNCH apart from others in the industry, and how has this contributed to our longevity?

What sets PUNCH apart is a combination of integrity, due diligence, best management practices including intense profit drive, respect for professional ethics, and discipline. All these have contributed in no small measure to its longevity.

And what are some of the key journalistic principles that have guided our media house since its inception, and how have they remained relevant over time?

Respect for professional ethics; good language use, better packaging, respect for timelines/deadlines; punchy and timely editorials; responding to and addressing reader's needs through follow-ups in particular.

Can you reflect on the role of investigative journalism at PUNCH and its impact on society over the past 50 years?

There is no doubt that investigative journalism by the PUNCH journalists has exposed a lot of things the governments as well as some public individuals and corporate bodies would have loved to hide. From the burning of Fela's house in the '70s, Cement Armada of the Gowon era, 'Tarkame-I-Dabor' you scandal, the \$2.8bn missing oil money palaver of the Shagari era; disclosures about coups and counter-coups, June 12 and MKO Abiola's struggles; to illegal bunkering and economic sabotage, etc; all had the punchy stamp of PUNCH newspapers' investigative prowess.

Its courageous roles in the above impacted positively on society and governance.



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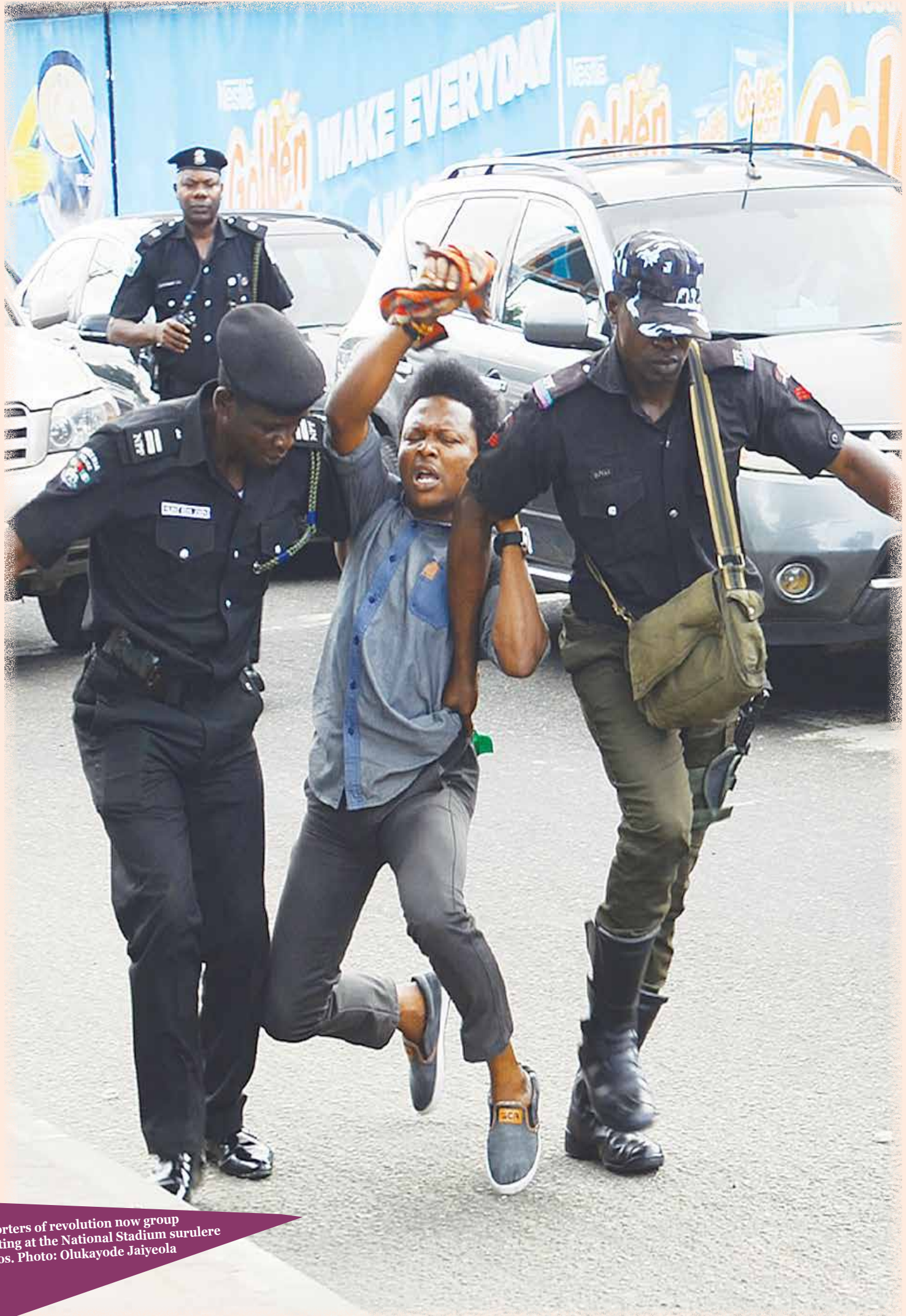
ALAT GOALS

ALAT PAY

MY BUSINESS CARD

MSME

ALAT FOR BUSINESS



•Supporters of revolution now group protesting at the National Stadium surulere in Lagos. Photo: Olukayode Jaiyeola

PUNCH in Nigeria and Africa is a credible source for news and updates – *Former Editor, Evening PUNCH, Teniola*

After a stint of work experience in other media houses, Eric Teniola decided to work in the PUNCH and it paid off as he rose to become a News Editor and the Editor of the Evening PUNCH before he left to work for the Ondo State Government and later, the Federal Government. He tells GODFREY GEORGE how his journey into PUNCH began and how it helped to shape his life

AT what point did you join PUNCH Newspapers?

I was a pioneer staff of PUNCH Newspapers. I was a part of the people who started the company. There was the standing PUNCH, which I was not a part of. But, when the PUNCH started, I was a pioneer staff. I was the State Editor, Oyo State of The PUNCH. This was many years ago.

How was your time like in The PUNCH?

It was a good experience. I was covering the whole of Oyo State, but I was based in Ibadan, the state capital. After that, I was posted to the headquarters in Lagos to cover the Constitution Drafting Committee. Then, I was sent to the State Assembly. I was later transferred to cover the National Assembly. Much later, I was made News Editor at The PUNCH. I then rose to become the Editor of the Evening PUNCH. I was the first and only editor of the Evening PUNCH. This was many years ago.

I left The PUNCH to become the press secretary to three governors in Ondo State – Ekundayo Olaleye, Olabode George, and Sunday Olukoya.

What was the transition like for you, from journalism to government relations?

It was an adventure, like any other. I later became Director in the Presidency at the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, where I served for about 12 years before I retired. So, moving from one role to the other was just an adventure for me, and I enjoyed all the roles I had the privilege to play by way of my various appointments. It was a way of contributing my own quota to national development.

What would say was your most pleasant experience while working with PUNCH?

The PUNCH is a family. At that time, we had a canteen at Onipetesi, Ikeja, Lagos. We had a lot of people, including Uncle Sam Amuka, before the split. We were like a family. Dayo Wright, Sola Odunfa, and Chief Ayo Adefolalu. It was simply a family setting. We worked as a family; the company grew as a family. Then, the founding chairman, the late Chief Olu Aboderin, was still alive. He made sure we worked as one family. At that time, I think our circulation was about 500,000 copies. This was because the judgment of the Supreme Court against the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's appeal of September 1979 got us selling about 740,000 copies of that particular edition.

Did you start your journalism career in the PUNCH?

I started my journalism career with the Nigerian Tribune under the late Lateef Jakande, a former governor of Lagos State. After a few years, I left Tribune for the Nigerian Herald, where I was a pioneer staff under Chief Ebenezer Williams and Chief Biodun Aloba. It was from the Nigerian Herald that I joined The PUNCH. It was a very good adventure with PUNCH.

What do you miss the most about working with PUNCH?

I miss a lot. The paper was well established. I remember the story that made us super was the burning of the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti's house. I did not cover the story because I was in Ibadan then. That was the story that pushed PUNCH to the front burner in Nigerian journalism. At that time, we were competing favourably with the Daily Times, the Nigerian Observer, and the New Nigeria – and these were strong papers of that time with

good circulation but most of them are dead now.

I am happy the PUNCH has survived till now because all its contemporaries are dead or dying.

What in your estimation is responsible for this survival?

It is the staff. PUNCH has a way of getting the very best in the industry and very dedicated staff for that matter. At that time, you dare not mess up. The tradition then was that if one wrote a story that ended up being denied, that person would be sacked. So, we had to work extra hard to make sure we got the correct story to avoid sanctions and queries. It took the courage of people like Muyiwa Adetiba, Lateef Jimoh, and others to establish and make the PUNCH what it was then.

The paper is still glowing and shining even today. I am particularly happy that the staff are still keeping the flag flying against all odds in this tough terrain of online and citizen journalism. May God bless them and continue to keep them strong.

What advice would you share with the management of PUNCH on how to manage the next 50 years and beyond?

(Laughs) I don't think I need to give any advice to the management and staff of PUNCH. They are doing an amazing job running the newspaper and keeping it relevant in this age and time. They are doing a remarkable job. They just need to continue in the PUNCH tradition.

Working hard is a PUNCH tradition. With hard work, commitment, dedication, and honesty, anyone can survive at PUNCH. Those who have managed the PUNCH after the founding chairman – Chief Ogunshola, Sir Osinubi, amongst others – have done a fantastic job. They just need to continue doing their very best to make sure that the paper does not lose its focus and taste. PUNCH all over Nigeria and around Africa is seen as a credible and fantastic source for news and updates. They must not drop the ball or compromise standards.

I know that with the current economic trajectory and inflation almost hitting the sky, it would be really difficult to keep the paper afloat. I am sure PUNCH's production has also dropped like other newspapers', but I think the quality of the PUNCH is still there. I buy and read PUNCH

every day, and when compared to other newspapers, you can clearly see the quality and hard work that goes into every piece.

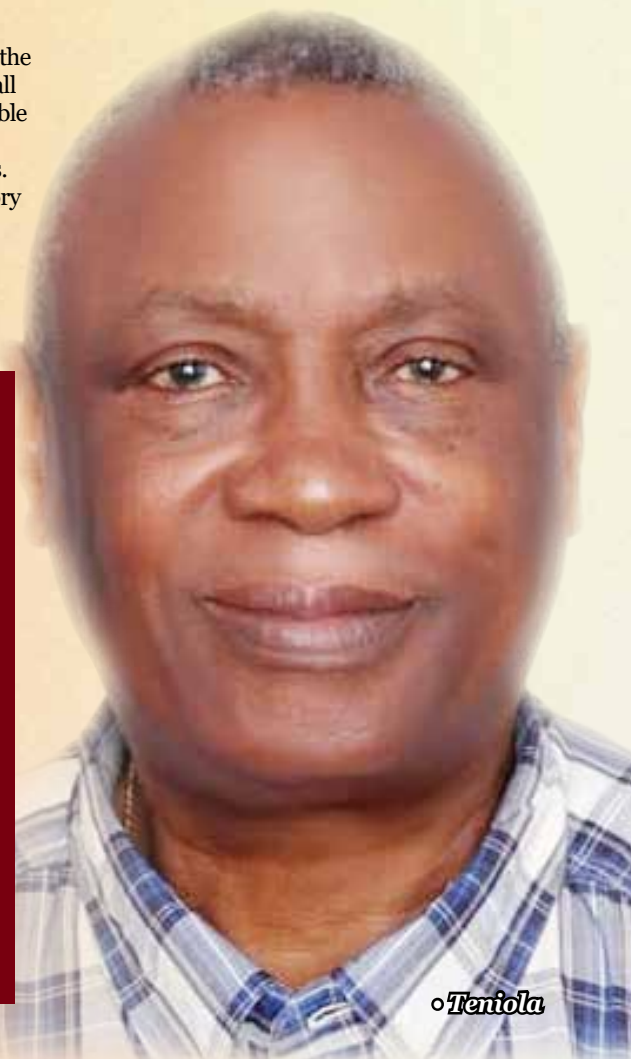
Those managing the paper now are doing a beautiful job managing the paper in this time of tough economic reality, and I pray and wish them success as PUNCH enters into another cycle of 50 years. They should continue to do what is right, uphold the spirit of excellence, shun tribalism and ethnicity, and run the paper with integrity and honesty so it can last another 50 years and even beyond.

How do you feel celebrating PUNCH at 50?

I feel very elated. This is a paper I gave my all, and I am proud it is still here, doing wonders. I simply want PUNCH to keep the flag flying. I am proud of PUNCH. That is the only legacy we have for those who have worked at PUNCH before. We are happy every day watching our baby doing well. We are extremely proud of all the staff of PUNCH and what they are doing. I read the stories PUNCH journalists put out, and I am just proud. They must all keep it up and make sure they keep the flag flying. Even as I write a column now for other newspapers, I am really proud of the work PUNCH is doing. I am proud to have worked in PUNCH, and I wish them a beautiful 50th anniversary celebration.

• Extracted from *Our PUNCH Years*, edited by Lekan Otyfodumrin

**I AM HAPPY
THE PUNCH
HAS SURVIVED
TILL NOW
BECAUSE ALL ITS
CONTEMPORARIES
ARE DEAD OR
DYING**



• Teniola

DOUBLING DOWN ON KWARA DEVELOPMENT

2019 AND ONGOING





Snippets of Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq's Strides in Kwara

KwaraLEARN, an edu-tech initiative transformed basic education in Kwara, leading to 48% rise in school enrolment in 40 weeks.

Abandoned for over 50 years, 11km Osi--Obbo Aiyegunle links Kwara with Ekiti State.



12- bed intensive care unit adjudged the largest in North central



Kwara Geographical Information Service (KW-GIS) revolutionised land administration in Kwara.



Kwara Garment Factory is rated the largest in West Africa

Notia fm, the first radio station in Kwara North



Awarded the 'HeforShe' Kwara is reputed as a trailblazer in women empowerment and gender inclusion in leadership in Africa.



Kwara State Social Investment Programmes (KWASSIP) runs largest social safety net by a subnational government



Iconic General Tunde Idiagbon flyover



First purpose-built contemporary film and art institute in West Africa.

Through PUNCH's scholarship I earned a Master's Degree abroad – Former Manager, Production, Diolulu

Former Manager of Editorial Production, Mrs Elizabeth Diolulu, speaks to VICTORIA EDEME on her rewarding experience at The PUNCH Nigeria Limited



• Diolulu

WHAT was your childhood and educational background like?

My name is Elizabeth Oritsegbemi Diolulu. formerly known as Miss Elizabeth Aya. I grew up during the Civil War. I started my primary education at Okotie Eboh Primary School: the school that went viral in Sapele, Delta State following the expulsion of a pupil, Success, from the school over failure to pay school fees. I did my primary one in that school in 1967. Thereafter, I went to Benin where I continued my primary school education properly.

I grew up at the Nigerian Institute for Palm Oil Research because my dad worked there. From there, I moved on to Anglican Girls Grammar School, Ughelli, Delta State. Thereafter, I studied Fine Art at Auchu Polytechnic, Edo State majoring in Textile Design. I served in Abeokuta Girls Grammar School, Ogun State where I taught Fine Art. It was in Ogun State that I made friends who helped to shape my life.

After my service year, I told my parents I wasn't going back to (then) Bendel State that I would love to stay back in Ogun State and look for a job in this part of the country. At first, I squatted with some of my friends but eventually, I moved in with my uncle and aunt at

the Government Reserved Area, Ikeja. I stayed with them till I got a job with PUNCH in 1987.

So, your first job was with PUNCH?

No. My first job was not at PUNCH. I don't like to be idle, so immediately after my NYSC, I got a job with a printing press. While I was there, I was illustrating books. Somebody saw me and he was surprised because that was the first time he saw a female artist draw and design. He was the one who told me that there was a job offer in PUNCH. He said that he saw the advertisement and that there was a vacancy at PUNCH. When I got to PUNCH, I met with the former Managing Director, Ademola Osinubi, who was the deputy editor then. I sat for a test an qualified for employment.

Why did you decide to study Fine Art?

Fine Art was what I did without any problem. I did it comfortably. It was something I did without any struggle. When I told my dad I wanted to study Fine Art, it was kind of easy because he knew I loved to design. I also had my internship at Hope Newspaper which was owned by the former Governor of Bendel State the late Gen. Ogbemudia who won

on the platform of the National Party of Nigeria. So, I was indirectly involved in politics from there. I was designing, and working for them as a young lady. When I was serving in Abeokuta, I was the first artist to draw a mural on a school wall.

How would you describe your years in PUNCH?

It was a wonderful experience. I was employed as the only female in the Graphics and Design department. I had to teach others how to be organised. People began to recognise me as the one who could supply whatever they needed in the department. I didn't know that people were watching me. I was just doing my thing because I loved my job. I devoted myself to the work. So, when we were to upgrade to computer and system applications, I was sent for training. It was such a beautiful experience.

How did you cope with the job when you got married?

I became born again; so a lot of things changed for me. I got married in 1997. In 1997, the signs of marriage started coming up. I got married to a man who is an evangelist. Incidentally, he wanted me to be a career woman. So, we didn't have any issues with my job. My husband is one of my greatest supporters. He encouraged me. My husband is not the kind of man who would monitor his wife up and down; he just wanted me to do well. He supported me in every area,

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF PUNCH OFFERS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONOUR ITS RESILIENT LEGACY AMIDST THE HARSH ECONOMIC REALITIES FACING THE PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY TODAY

especially when the children started to come; he helped to take care of them. He stood with me and didn't put too much pressure on me. I never employed home help while I was giving birth. If I was not at home, he would take care of the children. If not, I would bring the children to the office.

What were your high and lowest points while working at PUNCH?

The high moment was when I completed my Master's programme in Media Enterprise at the School of Media and Communication, Pan Atlantic University. Right from the beginning, I had the desire to return to school but there was no opportunity for me to do this. Along the line, I got exposed to some programmes, specifically certificate courses. Through the PUNCH scholarship, I went to the School of Media Communications; I paid 50 per cent of the tuition and PUNCH paid the rest. I was invited for written and oral interviews when I applied for the programme at its inception in 2009. The day I was graduating was the peak for me.

Were there any low points?

The lowest point I experienced was when the military was persecuting us. You could just be working in the studio and some strange people would just walk in and order you to get out of the office. That was the lowest point. At that time, I used to be very alert and I would carry everything that we needed for production outside the office to my house. I was not married at the time and I did that as an extra measure if we needed to produce outside the office. That was the real low point in my life. There were times you would be in the office and you would see some strange people walk into the office, you would not know who they were and they could be slapping people on their heads. I had been to the office before and as I sat down, some people walked up to me and shouted, 'Get out of this place now'. I never thought those kind of things could happen.

As a female graphic artist among males, did you experience any gender-related challenge?

No, I did not. That's because I did not see any difference between them and me. If I had challenges, it may be when I was sick. There was a day I came to work and I collapsed; I was immediately rushed to the hospital. I did not know I was that ill, but because of the things that I had scheduled, I came to work.

Did you ever feel intimidated being the only woman among the men?

I never felt intimidated. I never thought about it because I do what I do well; so no one intimidates me.

How did you deal with harassment?

I just walked through it.

Do you recall any incident?

The one I can recall was when I was much younger. As a young lady then, when you got into the newsroom, every guy would think they could have a go at you but I ignored them.

The pre-press once practiced the 'cut-and-paste' method of page planning, which has since given way to modern technology in newspaper production. What exactly did the 'cut-and-paste' mean?

WHAT it simply meant was that instead of planning pages on the computer like we do now, what we had then was cardboard which was in columns. We had a heap in the office. If you wanted to plan a page, you would cut the cardboard. If you are doing the cover, the masthead would be at the top of the cardboard; then we used cow gum to paste the masthead on a film form on the cardboard. We used a craft knife to cut it. We had rulers, set square, and a board that could be likened to the ones students use for technical drawing in the secondary school.

We used Ronson oil to remove some stains while preparing the paper. If you put the gum on the cardboard, you paste the material on it. The news material, after the editing, would be typed with compugraphic typesetting machines, and the materials were exposed in dark rooms

it was in the gally form because the gally paper would not tear and you have to cut it. The sub-editor would then instruct us on how he wanted us to do the layout. Then we applied the cow gum and created designs with it. What I was known for was coming up with very complicated designs; some of the copies are still in the library. I became very good at it and when we were doing 16 pages, I could paste 13 pages of the newspaper. We had a lot of people working for us but a lot of them just left the job for me because they felt I liked to work. What I did then was that I would come early and begin to work on the early pages, and then the editor would do corrections. I would re-paste and send it to the people in the newsroom who would sign it in at the lithography unit. Lithographers would take a photo shot and convert the page to a film. They would strap it together, take it to the darkroom, and expose it onto a plate. After it had been exposed on the plate, they would take it through a processor and finally, it would be washed clean. The plate would be washed, bent, and sent to the press hall. When it is strapped, it would not be neat because you would see the lines in the newspaper. The dark lines are because they could not cover lines with opaque fluid. I had to know all the processes of the work until we were introduced to computer software packages.

What's your advice for young employees?

What I would advise the younger ones to do is to be very serious with the work they are doing, because PUNCH is like a training ground. A lot of people have left PUNCH but now they are superstars. You have to work hard and if you can work hard in PUNCH, you would go out there and be very successful. A lot of people have left the company and they are doing well both within and outside the country. If the company did not have a culture of hard work, I am not sure they would do well. There is no person who diligently did his job that is out there and is not doing well. Pay attention and be devoted to your work. I never thought that I would have the career path that I did, but I am so grateful for the career path particularly as far as newspaper design is concerned. I am glad that I could contribute positively to PUNCH. As a young person, my ambition was to design a fabric that every person in this country would wear; I never knew that my dream would come true through designing a newspaper.

What was your most memorable moment in your 35 years in PUNCH?

I was the longest serving production manager in PUNCH. In those years, managers in that position do not last. They may walk into some fraud or the problems and be told to resign. When I got there, I affected them positively. I was there for about three years and seven months. When I left there, I was so sad. I was moved back to the pre-press department. Another peak for me was the handling of the PUNCH Christian Fellowship for over 10 years.

What do you think is the future of newspaper business in Nigeria?

It seems as if paper production would fade out but I doubt it would happen in this part of the world. Even in Europe and America, they still have the print. Recently, Goss International, makers of the printing machine we use, sold it to Manroland, which is a press design company in Germany. Now that Goss has been fused with Manroland, the idea is for them to come out with designs for web presses that would be used in the future. They would come out with presses that would do less but achieve a lot. That print would fade away, I do not think so. Some books have to be printed, especially for learning as the computer is not too good for the eyes. The paper is still very handy and useful; so, I do not think that it would go like that.

What have you been up to since you left PUNCH in 2022?

It's been wonderful. I just needed a break from doing the job I did for 35 years. Travelling is one of my hobbies. The gateway for travelling is open for me, as I went on some trips last year. At the moment, I'm still on my travelling spree?

What are your best wishes for PUNCH at 50?

When I started working in PUNCH, we had virtually nothing. We simply moved along with the evolution in journalism and technology. My prayer is that PUNCH will be able to get into the mainstream and do so well. I wish the newspaper all the best, as it moves into another era of growth and development. God will continue to make PUNCH shine.



• Diolulu



GIANT STRIDES OF GOVERNOR AGBU KEFAS IN KEEPING THE PROMISE MADE TO THE PEOPLE OF TARABA STATE



Cars of assorted brands donated traditional rulers



Commissioning of Fire fighting trucks and expansion of runway at the Danbaba Suntal Airport, Jalingo



Cars of assorted brands donated to Security agencies



Ongoing renovation at the Taraba State House of Assembly Complex



Ongoing renovation of Taraba Government Lodge Abuja



Ongoing renovation of Governor's Lodge, Abuja



New structures in some primary schools in the state



FREE EDUCATION MODEL CLASSROOM



Renovated and rehabilitated Kefas Palliative Market



Jalingo modern Abattoir entrance gate



Jalingo modern Abattoir, at different stages of completion



The newly renovated SSG's office



A contractor explaining the project progress to Governor Agbu Kefas



Remodelled Government Lodge Wukar

PUNCH does not betray the trust of its readers – *Former Editor, The PUNCH, Ogunleye*

Gbemiga Ogunleye was a former Editor of The PUNCH Daily Title and also the Deputy Editor-in-Chief. He later switched full time to legal practice as a media law practitioner after a meritorious service at the flagship newspaper, which he joined in the late 90s. In this interview with ADEKUNLE SULAIMON, he bares it all, narrating his experience first as a features Editor and how he got to sit as the Editor

WHAT inspired you to pursue a career in journalism, and how did you end up working with such a reputable media house as the PUNCH?

Growing up, I was surrounded by newspapers and magazines. My father was a civil servant who bought the daily newspapers regularly. He bought at least five papers a day. When he brought the papers home, I would relieve him of them and would bury my head in the newspapers and magazines. I remember reading magazines like DRUM, SPEAR, NEWBREED, etc. I guess I fell in love with the written word at an early age. I remember one article I read as a 15-year-old, which has stuck to my memory to date. It was written by a very witty fellow, with the pen name SAD SAM. The title of the article was: 'Oh Lord, save me from my friend. My enemy, I can take care of!'

So, with such a background, it should be no surprise that I ended up being a journalist. If you grew up in the 70s, you would feel the impact of The PUNCH. Its punch line was: 'The Lively Paper for Lively Minds.'

It was a refreshingly different newspaper. I loved the cartoons, and of course, as a teenager, one looked forward to seeing the beautiful 'Page 3 Girls' that the paper featured every day.

Besides, The PUNCH positioned itself as the voice of the voiceless, always holding the military government to account with its biting reports. Not to also forget the paper's coverage of the Fela Anikulapo travails with the government. It was remarkable. So, I told myself that one day, I would work at The PUNCH.

As my Christian friends would say: the rest is history.

What would you say were the key things that convinced you to join The PUNCH during your first meeting with the then General Manager, Mr Ademola Oshinubi, in 1996?

Mr. Oshinubi's reputation as a thorough-bred reporter had preceded him. He was a crack reporter with a high level of integrity.

When I was ushered into his office, he gave me a firm handshake and his opening statement: 'let

DURING MY TIME AT THE PUNCH, IT WAS AUTOMATIC FOR STAFF TO HAVE A PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN SALARY EVERY JANUARY. I CAN'T REMEMBER THE PERCENTAGE NOW. OF COURSE, PUNCH WAS THE HIGHEST-PAYING NEWSPAPER IN THE COUNTRY

me sell The PUNCH to you!'

I knew immediately that I was going to join the PUNCH train.

Can you share some of the very memorable stories you covered your career at the PUNCH?

Let me share one that still gives me goose pimples every time I remember it.

The year was 1994, and there was tension between Nigeria and Cameroon over the oil-rich Bakassi peninsular. The threat of war between both countries was real. Journalists were barred from going to the area, but my Features Editor at The Guardian sent me there as our readers were entitled to know what was going on there.

After landing at the Calabar airport, I had to take a speed boat to Bakassi.

I couldn't swim, so I thought to myself; 'what if this boat capsizes?' My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the noise of another boat packed full with naval policemen. I was shaking! I managed to hide my taperecorder and camera.

The men barked orders, asked for our destination, and demanded that we pay 'water rate'.

Before leaving Calabar, I had a change of outfit. When I looked into the mirror, I could pass for a semi-literate fisherman. So, the Naval



•Ogunleye

policemen were fooled. But when I was slow in paying the water rate, they threatened to throw me into the Atlantic ocean. That was some experience! It was one thought one would have wished ever came, but I was there, frightened and at the same time ready to work - feed our readers with the happenings in the warring border zones.

What do you believe sets The PUNCH apart from others in terms of its approach to journalism and reporting?

When I was receiving the first Newspaper of the year award on behalf of The PUNCH, I think that was in 1997, I said The PUNCH was a newspaper read by the cleric and mechanic; a paper read by the professor and the proletariat.

•See next page

'PUNCH does not betray the trust of its readers'

•Continued from page 71

PUNCH is a newspaper that is not afraid to hold leaders and the government to account.

These qualities set it apart and earned it the trust of the people.

How does it feel to be part of a media house that is celebrating 50 years of excellence in journalism, and what do you think the future holds for the industry?

Naturally, I feel happy. Especially because those who took over the baton from us are keeping the flag flying. In a birthday message I sent to the Managing Director of The PUNCH, some days back, I told him that we are proud of him.

What would you say about brown envelope journalism, and how has PUNCH maintained an applaudable position on this menace?

The ethics of our profession frowns strongly at what you have described as brown envelope journalism. It diminishes the reporter and the organisation he represents.

What The PUNCH has done to insulate its reporters from this malaise is the attractive welfare package it has for its staff.

During my time at The PUNCH, it was automatic for staff to have a percentage increase in salary every January. I can't remember the percentage now. Of course, PUNCH was the highest-paying newspaper in the country. And the paper also paid its reporters transport allowance for them to go and source stories. That, to a very large extent, addressed the issue of brown envelope journalism. But don't forget that out of every eleven disciples, there would always be a Judas. So, once a reporter is guilty of the 11th commandment, which is, 'Thou Shall Not Be Caught', he or she is shown the way out.

Can you share any behind-the-scenes stories from your time as a journalist that you think exemplifies the dedication and integrity of your profession?

I would say that the resolve of journalists of my time to ensure that the country returns to democratic rule stands out. We were uncompromising on this. We wrote articles, pungent editorials, and stories to impress it on the military that those trained to kill have no business in government.

How did you find your feet in the legal world years after being a successful journalist?

And what were the challenges you encountered in navigating into the new path, and how did you overcome them?

Mentorship is important. It has helped me a lot. Finding my feet in law was a bit tasking. I remember enrolling in LASU that year to study law while combining my duties as the editor of this great newspaper. After my evening classes, I would drive down back to PUNCH to coordinate the news that would make the paper the following day. It was not the social media days that we have now where it is very easy for one to do the job from anywhere. In all honesty, I have the fortune of being mentored by one of the best legal minds: Mr. Jiti Ogunye.

Through his guidance, it wasn't too difficult to navigate the legal field. And I guess my background as a journalist has helped me.

Since I enjoy reading, I am happy to do legal research.

My field of interest in law is media law, and I am enjoying it.

Looking back on your career as a reporter-turn-Editor, what accomplishments are you most proud of, and what do you hope your legacy will be in the world of journalism?

I don't know whether I can call them accomplishments, but I am proud of the relationships I had both at The PUNCH and in the world of journalism as a whole. Sincerely, I don't know about legacy. Mine was to do my job well, impact people positively, and leave the rest to God.

What advice would you give to readers and consumers of news in terms of critically evaluating media sources and discerning between credible journalism and misinformation?

I would advise readers and consumers of news to strive for some sort of media literacy. The new media have changed tremendously the way news is produced and consumed. Therefore, readers should be more discerning in receiving and consuming news.

Because I am what your generation calls the old school, I still go to the legacy media to confirm my news. Take the unfortunate passage of the MD of Access Holdings, for instance, even though I had read the news from an Instagram handle, I didn't believe it until I had read from the more established newspapers. I would advise readers to toe that path.

Finally, what message would you like to share with your colleagues and readers as The PUNCH celebrates 50 years of remarkable journalism?

Continue to trust The PUNCH, and it will not betray your trust.

• Extracted from *Our Punch Years*, edited by Lekan Otufodunrin



• Scenes of the #endsars protests at the Ibeju toll gate, Victoria Island, Lagos and the access gate of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Ikeja, Lagos.
Photo: Akinsola Akinrinade

PUNCH's culture of excellence is still there – Executive Secretary NPAN, Smith

When people read PUNCH, they know they're reading the truth, says an ex-PUNCHman, Feyi Smith, in this interview with SAMUEL BOLAJI

KINDLY walk us through your journey to journalism?

My journey to journalism started in 1978 when I enrolled in the Nigerian Institute of Journalism.

I didn't want to read journalism. I never considered it as my first choice or my first love. I wanted to read Law. And the essence of trying to read Law was that I felt that the society needed somebody to fight for the underprivileged. And I felt that standing in the courtroom and taking up cases for the underprivileged would be the way to fight for them. But it was never meant to be because I never got admission to read Law.

Then Journalism knocked on the door. I applied and got admitted into the Nigerian Institute of Journalism. But even before then, I was an avid reader of newspapers as I grew up in an environment where my father had an extensive collection of newspapers. I was exposed to reading newspapers at a tender age. Having followed keenly the works of some journalists, I concluded that I could also use journalism to express myself and to fight for the underprivileged as I had always wanted to. That was why I went to the school of journalism and graduated in 1980.

From there, I got into electronics. But I was not comfortable with electronics, so I went to work at NTA Abeokuta. It was a classmate of mine, Lanre Adebayo, who facilitated my employment at NTA Abeokuta.

The two of us were employed the same day by the then general manager, Mr. H.O. Robinson. I worked at NTA Abeokuta for six months, because during that period, I was living in Lagos and working in Abeokuta. So, I worked for two days and was off for one day, alternating my shifts, and shuttling between Lagos and Abeokuta. On the day that I finished my two-day shift, I was back in Lagos because the next day would be my off day and on the third day, I was expected back in Abeokuta for another two days. I was unstable. That's number one.

And number two, I didn't like it. I had always loved print journalism. And in 1981 or so, about the early 80s, PUNCH Nigeria Limited offered me that opportunity, and I became a PUNCHman.

Reflecting on your time at PUNCH, please share a memorable story that you covered that had a significant impact on the community or society at large?

I joined PUNCH in the early 80s as a court reporter. From being a court reporter, I became the Lagos State correspondent, and I also covered the Lagos State House of Assembly during that period. From there, I moved to the National Assembly as the National Assembly correspondent, designated to cover the House of Representatives.

From the National Assembly, I became the Lagos City Editor of The PUNCH. I was moved from there to Dodan Barracks as the State House correspondent. I've covered so many areas in reporting, with divergent experiences.

I could say that my period in the National Assembly was very instructive and revealing, with so many exclusive stories. I became a specialist in exclusive stories and breaking news. I served under people like Eric Teniola, who was our Assembly editor then.

I remember a time when Bakin Zuwo became the governor of Kano State, and we had to go and visit him at 1004 – it was barely three months that he became the governor then – I was there with some other colleagues to go and interview him. Immediately I walked in with other colleagues, the late Dr Junaid, a member of the National Assembly, I never knew that he could recognise me, said 'so, it's you.' Jokingly, he asked what the latest scandal in the National Assembly was.

I said, 'How would I know? I'm not a member of the National Assembly. I wouldn't know.' Then he fired back at me and asked if that was not what I reported every time. Every time, scandal? I went back home that day and picked up old newspapers. I flipped through, and I saw that the man was right. It was from one scandal to another that I was reporting back then. One of the stories I did then was about the National Assembly clinic.

Every year, there's a substantial budget allocated for the clinic. Then one of their own fell ill. They took him to the clinic, and the National Assembly clinic killed him. I wrote the story that if they had given the injection

they gave to the man to an elephant, the elephant would have died. This became a subject on the floor of the House of Reps.

I remember another story I did on the House of Representatives and one of the members saw me and said I was going to die young. He said I never saw anything good about the National Assembly. But a friend of mine, a senior friend of mine, who was one of them, intervened and asked the man to reverse that curse.

I was reporting for a better society, and PUNCH gave me the opportunity. They never censored me. They used my stories well, and the organisation was better for it. I believe the leadership of the National Assembly, at that point in time, also took one lesson or another from my stories and corrected themselves. I can, therefore, say that, in a way, I contributed significantly to political reporting at the National Assembly.

How did your role at PUNCH contribute to shaping the newspaper's identity and reputation over the years?

PUNCH newspaper is known for breaking the news. And it had a lot of old soldiers in those of us reporters, many of us who were carrying the flag.

As I said, we learned under masters in the industry. PUNCH is a place that allows you to express yourself. So, we did our bit, and we learned from the masters, and we contributed to making PUNCH what it is. PUNCH became the newspaper of first choice because of its emphasis on exclusive stories.

Reflecting on your experiences, how did working at PUNCH contribute to your professional development?

Well, as I said, essentially, I covered politics. I was at the National Assembly. I went to Dodan Barracks. I covered the Lagos State House of Assembly. I covered the Lagos State Government. It was all about politics for me.

I became a specialist in political reporting. When I moved to the next organisation in 1988, I got a political assignment. I was given an assignment to go and cover the Constituent Assembly in Abuja for the Republic newspaper. From Republic newspaper, I moved to Champion. I spent less than six months at the Republic. In that same 1988, I moved to Champion newspaper as a senior political correspondent.

During my time at PUNCH, as the Lagos City Editor, I had some reporters under me anchoring the news on Lagos Island. So, when I became deputy news editor, I already knew how to marshal the foot soldiers in news coverage in different areas. And I knew where the news was.

My time at PUNCH, generally, prepared me for the next phase in my journalism career, which was becoming a senior political correspondent at the Champion. Then, I became the deputy news editor of Champion. I became the news editor of Champion. I became deputy editor of *Daily Champion*; I became editor of *Saturday Champion*, and also, a general manager. I even veered into marketing. All these things were a result of the training and the moulding that I got from my superiors at PUNCH. I worked under very nice editors who were always ready to put me through.

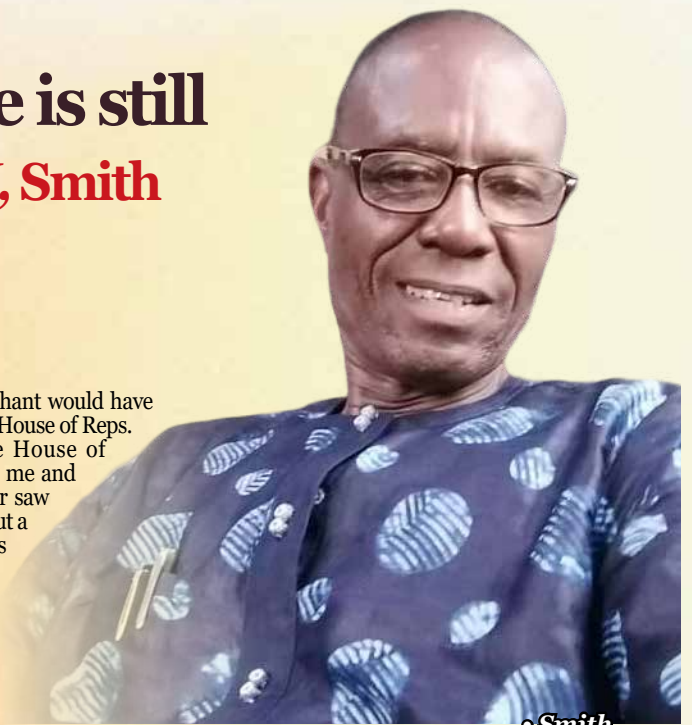
I worked under Tayo Kehinde. I worked under Innocent Adikwu. I worked under Mark Balogun and many others. These are great people and field marshals in journalism. They guided me and put me through. They showed me the way. We benefited from it, and it made us better journalists at that time and prepared us for the task ahead, which we are grateful for.

What can you say were your greatest achievements while working at PUNCH?

In the course of working at PUNCH, I knew that there couldn't be any barrier because it allowed me to cultivate different sources, an extensive network of sources. As a journalist, you're as good as your sources. PUNCH gave me the opportunity for extensive news sources across the divides, military, politicians, generally.

For instance, in 1985, when the (Ibrahim) Babangida coup took place, General (Tunde) Idiagbon was not in the country. He went for Hajj with two other members of the Armed Forces Ruling Council.

I broke the news that Idiagbon was back in the country when he returned. That was September 1985. I broke the news. Well, I got angry because when they were using the story, they put a question mark on the headline. But I was so sure of my report that Idiagbon was back in the country. And it was the lead story of The PUNCH for that very edition. I think it was September 12, 1985, and the headline we used was, 'Idiagbon back in the country?' They put a question mark. Well, I was happy that on the following day,



oSmith

the then Minister of Information confirmed the story that the man was actually back in the country, and it became the lead story of The PUNCH for the next day that 'Government confirms PUNCH story, Idiagbon back in the country.'

It was the benefit of the network that PUNCH afforded me that I was able to tap into to break that news.

What was it like working at PUNCH during your time?

You don't want to go. Because where we were then, at Onipetesi, when you were in the newsroom, you would not see sunlight outside, so you would not even know that time had gone. Its only when you stepped out, that you'd realise it was already night.

We were operating like a family; we were one good family. There's a PUNCH family. And it may surprise you to know that even as I speak to you, some ex-Punchers have formed an alumni WhatsApp group, and, I guess, they must have close to about 100 people on that WhatsApp group.

Tell us your 'A time I will never forget' memory at PUNCH.

Well, I have said one of them, which was that story on Idiagbon.

But the other thing that I can also say is that when I was embedded in (former President Olusegun) Obasanjo's farm, we had politicians from different camps meeting there regularly. I would go and attend the meeting as one of them and come out and report the story. People were wondering how I was getting those stories. They were surprised that such events were happening. But I was enjoying it because I had a great source. Then, when the meeting was going to take place, my source would tell me and even drive me to the place. He was a frontline politician who also attended the meetings.

I would be there attending the meeting with them. It was a period in my reporting at PUNCH that I can never forget. Very interesting period.

What was your experience of PUNCH Management during your time?

We were always eager to apply for our claims on Fridays. That was the day we would go to the accounts department to collect our claims. When we went out on assignments, we looked forward to applying to collect our claims. The thing is that the management would have approved of it. So, there was no problem.

You could spend your money while you were out on assignments for transport and things like that. The organisation encouraged you to spend your money and they would refund you your money.

Also, the organisation will defend you when you run into trouble. I remember a story I did about a former Inspector General of Police, M.D. Yusuf. They took us to court and PUNCH assigned a lawyer to me. The case was being heard at Kaduna at the time and PUNCH facilitated my movement from Lagos to Kaduna and back to Lagos anytime there was a hearing. The newspaper also ensured that I had legal representation in court. The organisation was there for me, and I'm sure the organisation is still there today for other people who find themselves in similar situations. So, these are commendable things about the management of PUNCH.

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Congratulations on reaching this amazing milestone! Your hard work
and dedication to the media industry is worthy of celebration.

Here's to the next fifty years!

SIGNED:

Mele Kolo Kyari OFR
Group Chief Executive Officer





Kwara Hotel: Another moment of Seward's folly

RAFIU AJAKAYE

IN 1867, a former US Secretary of State William Seward committed \$7.2m of taxpayers' money to seal a deal that bought Alaska from Russia, triggering a flurry of reactions that culminated in the media historically dubbing the development 'Seward's folly' and calling it an outright waste of public resources.

Poor Seward would become a hero a few years after. In 1869, US netted a huge gold deposit in Alaska. A few years later, Alaska yielded a humongous oil find for the United States, making the \$7.2m totally inconsequential. That speaks to vision — or luck?

Closer home, and more consequential for Kwara, a certain Sheikh Rashid Ibn Saeed el-Makhtoum laid the foundation for the greatness and beauty called Dubai. At the height of his investments in the desert city, he was repeatedly called out and derided in unprintable terms. People wondered if he had gone nut. "If you build it, they will come" was a quote erroneously attributed to him, even though the often wrongly quoted words fit perfectly into the dream that is now Dubai. el-Makhtoum built and also followed it up — thanks to his equally visionary successors who carried on his dreams to the admiration of the rest of the world.

Enter Kwara Hotel. Over the past few days, the iconic facility has grabbed news headlines as the state government announced a bold attempt to remodel and rebuild the 172-room Kwara hotel in the most comprehensive way ever since it was built in 1975 by the Brig-Gen David Bamigboye regime.

The step, as with all major government decisions, has split the commentariat down the middle. Outside of those who agree entirely with the government on account of their own belief that the administration is patriotic enough to make the right decision, three other schools have emerged: those who want it done, but are skeptical about the cost vis-a-vis the return on investment; those who feel Kwara does not need such a facility and the money should instead be spread on monthly salaries and allowances of workers or some other things; and those who feel the government should rebuild it but should give the job to another firm, Crystal Group of Companies, which they said had committed to fix the hotel for N3bn under a concessioning agreement that allows it to run the facility for some 15 years. To the latter, the government erred as two contracts now exist on the same project.

The differing opinions, a core pillar of democracy, go to show how much people follow government's activities and programmes. It is welcome. But the argument about the concessioning is mostly incorrect and partisan. There are no two contracts on the project. While the state executive council did indeed approve a concessioning to Crystal, the approval was glaringly conditional upon

the House of Assembly backing it. No legislative approval was communicated for the concession; hence, no contract was sealed. This is confirmed by the June 2, 2022 document of Harmony Holdings sent to the Crystal in the wake of the conditional approval by the council.

Besides, the Crystal's N3bn arrangement was never a wholesale remodelling and renovation of the Kwara Hotel. It was a piecemeal, wing-by-wing, or incremental renovation deal, which then allows Crystal to also manage it for 15 years. The comparison of a piecemeal renovation with complete remodelling, upgrades, and reconstruction that replaces everything in the hotel, except the carcass, is far-fetched. No basis for it.

Next is the argument about due process and transparency. This argument — apologies to lawyers — is deemed 'abandoned' as it was not supported by any facts. Government twice advertised the job with all the requirements: first on August 18, 2023; and, again, on October 18, 2023, both in the printed versions of Nigerian Tribune and the Herald newspapers. Three firms applied and went through a competitive process, and one, Craneburg, was picked based on its capacity to fund and execute the huge project. Crystal did not apply. Neither did the Kwara PDP and its allies, who bellyache about which firm got the job. The government has a job to do, and it is its responsibility to ensure that only a firm deemed competent and financially viable is picked. In this job, the contractor brings the money — to be repaid in a structured way over a period of time. This saves everyone the burden of slow job delivery or perennial demand for variation where government directly funds a project.

Why didn't this one go through the House like the botched process involving Crystal? That is because no concession is involved. All the contractor does is to rebuild and furnish Kwara Hotel to required five-star specifications and hand it over to the state for further decisions on its management.

With an increasingly busy airport and major tourism sites and potentials, a state as strategically positioned as Kwara should not be without first-class hospitality facilities. Having none stunts its socioeconomic growth and limits its potentials to host not just important events but to also harvest the opportunities that come with them.

The Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) 2023 attracted at least 35,000 delegates and 1,600 exhibitors from across 75 countries, with \$43bn worth of trade and investment deals. Cairo, the city in its fourth stage of development, hosted it at its International Exhibition Centre where the first edition of the IATF had also taken place in 2018. Try to imagine the reverberating effects of 35,000 valued guests entering a city for seven days: hotel reservations, visits to the Egyptian mummies, the Pyramids, camel rides, the cruise on the Nile, and hundreds of thousands of gigs along different value chains. That is what comes with such a crowd. But Egypt intentionally created the infrastructure

to accommodate high-valued crowd in the first place, including Presidents, Governors, and Ministers, regardless of its own challenges. Success occurs when opportunity meets preparation, said Zig Ziglar.

Tens of thousands of people visit Dubai's Museum of the Future and other iconic facilities that make the city a tourist delight. That is billions of dollars in revenue. But Dubai did not start today. The dream that birthed one of the most visited places on earth started with a man a few decades ago. And he was criticised for wasting tax payers' money. He was condemned for building castles in the air. Now we know better. el-Makhtoum is no more, but his dream has turned Dubai to the most visited place in the Middle East after Makkah, the birth place of Islam's most celebrated Prophet.

Who says that this peaceful and serene Kwara, or its prized capital city, cannot place itself in a pole position for conferencing and resort? Let's give Governor AbdulRazaq a chance as he re-engineers the Kwara economy towards enterprise, agribusiness, innovation, tourism and hospitality with projects such as garment factory, international conference centre, innovation hub, visual arts centre, sugar film factory, tax house, Shea butter factory, industrial park, special agroprocessing zone, among others.

The road to greatness is mostly paved with huge investments and great efforts — mostly scoffed at in the beginning, by opposition and those who may not see the vision from the start.

One more thing: why can't the government channel the resources elsewhere, some have quipped. Rebuilding the Kwara Hotel and doing other developmental projects aren't mutually exclusive. It is not a zero-sum game. On the day the government announced the Kwara Hotel project, it announced several road projects across the state and the establishment of the Kwara State University Teaching Hospital. Development is not a destination; it is an unending process.

N17bn (\$14.4m), some critics said, appears a huge amount! But is it truly huge compared to the financial requirement of building a five-star hotel in an economy where a dollar equals N1,200? In 2018, five years ago when dollar was worth 200 naira, Transcorp Hotels budgeted N40bn (\$32.8m) to upgrade its facilities. The Lagos Continental Hotel was built for a total sum of N99.6bn, or \$81.1m. Recently, the Lagos Oriental Hotel was valued at N300bn (\$250m). While the size and location of these facilities may vary, the point is that premium hospitality facilities like the soon-to-be-rebuilt Kwara Hotel never come cheap. Not here, not anywhere in the world. If you doubt this, check out how much went into building the Burj-al-Khalifa (N1.8trillion), Emirates Palace (N3.6tr), Wynn Palace (N5.04tr), or Abraj Al-Bait (N19.2tr). Yes, these are admittedly very exclusive facilities in choice corners of the world, but they have a long value chain extending to the poorest in their societies. Kwara Hotel, even if not exactly like the ones above, isn't much different if we truly want it to stand out.

• *Ajakaye is Chief Press Secretary to the Governor*



• Gov AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, Kwara state governor and Chairman of Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF.)

The whys of a university of education in Kwara

RAFIU AJAKAYE

IN one of his many writings on leadership which he titled 'Six Studies in World Strategy', America's all-time diplomatic czar and statesman Henry Kissinger said 'leaders think and act at the intersection of two axes: the first, between the past and the future; the second, between the abiding values and aspirations of those they lead. Their first challenge is analysis, which begins with a realistic assessment of their society based on its history, mores, and capacities. Then they must balance what they know, which is necessarily drawn from the past, with what they intuit about the future, which is inherently conjectural and uncertain. It is this intuitive grasp of direction that enables leaders to set objectives and lay down a strategy'.

The above was what came to my mind as Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq set the ball rolling for Kwara to own a state university of education — for a start. It is interesting to note that the report of the transition implementation committee (in 2019) that gave the Governor some preliminary insights into the whats, the hows, and the wheres of the state had specifically mentioned a need for Kwara to own one.

A few persons have asked why Kwara should have a university of education. A few others have scoffed at the initiative. What I observe is that most of the critics appear to not know what the issues are.

At this moment in history, our colleges of education in Nigeria are grasping for breath. Many of them hang on government's subventions and bailouts, such as were again recently approved for our Colleges in Kwara to offset their salaries. In response to some of the challenges that colleges of education now face

nationwide, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu recently signed Federal Colleges of Education Act 2023, which, among other things, empowers Federal Colleges of Education to run NCE and related degree programmes concurrently. The Act, which repealed the one of 2004, states its objectives to include provision of legal basis for the award of diplomas and degrees and give the Colleges the powers to expand the scope of the curriculum of the Colleges to degree-awarding institutions.

Stakeholders in the colleges of education call it dual mode, and have hailed the President for assenting to the bill. At an audience with them on August 21, 2023, the leadership of the Joint Academic Staff Unions in Tertiary Institutions (JASUTI) appealed to the state government to domesticate the Federal Colleges of Education Act in Kwara State. Another request of JASUTI on that day -- and always -- is for the government to convert one of the COED to a university of education. When the government set up visitation panels to the three COED in Kwara State, their terms of reference included to examine and recommend how the state can draw inspirations from the new College of

ON TOP OF THIS IS THE PERSISTING INFRASTRUCTURAL DEFICITS AND LACK OF ENOUGH ACCESS TO RESEARCH GRANTS NOW WORSENERD BY A NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY THAT PEGS THE SLOTS THAT COLLEGES OF EDUCATION HAVE IN THE TERTIARY EDUCATION TRUST

Education Act 2023.

Colleges of Education were, to an extent, the successor institutions to the old Teachers' College or Training Institute. But times have changed. Enrollment in the colleges has dropped drastically. For instance, as of November 2, 2023, the total number of students at the College of Education Ilorin is 2,751, which is hardly a fraction of Year One students in some universities. Ironically, the staff strength of the same college stands at 604, more than half of them being non-academic. Of the 604, the academic staff are just 163, representing a paltry 26.9% of the people on the payroll.

Reforms are inevitable, and the setting up of the visitation panels is the first step. The public should note that the early years of the administration were spent stabilising these colleges following several months of crises, which the new administration had since resolved.

Despite resolving the crises that spanned different periods of the former administration through 2019, the colleges remain at a critical intersection of history as the pressure for reforms and modernisation mounts. Many of them, especially CoED Ilorin and Oro, are now affiliated to some universities within and outside of Kwara State. It is a survival strategy, not something they willingly do. The affiliation offers their students an opportunity to upgrade their NCE to a university degree. This is a money-spinning initiative by the benefiting university at the expense of the Colleges. All the colleges benefit in this arrangement is to keep their NCE students.

On top of this is the persisting infrastructural deficits and lack of enough access to research grants now worsened by a new federal government policy that pegs the slots that Colleges of Education have in the Tertiary Education Trust (TETFUND).

Hunkering down for reforms that accommodate the current economic situation, the administration has decided, for a start, to make one of the three COED a university of education and the mechanisms for doing that have been set in motion with the committee led by Prof. Shuaib Oba Abdurraheem. That way, new and expectedly more enrollees are coming in either for double honours degrees, diplomas, or the traditional NCE. With more students come more revenues and the colleges (and their alumni) are saved the dishonour of dying off. The schools would no longer need affiliations to some other universities to keep their NCE students. And the colleges (now university) will have a stronger footing in the club of TETFUND beneficiaries for research grants and infrastructural development.

It thinks the burden of initial investments that would naturally be made will pale into insignificance when the hard work and the ingenuity of the government bear great fruits for all.

• Rafiu Ajakaye is Chief Press Secretary to the Governor of Kwara State

PUNCH is courageous, it must not lose its essence – *Former Editor, Adetiba*

Mr Muyiwa Adetiba was a pioneer employee of PUNCH Newspapers having started with the Sunday PUNCH and later became the Editor of that title in the 80s. He shares with GODFREY GEORGE his exciting time in PUNCH, the high and low moments, and his journey into the world of journalism

How did you become a member of the PUNCH family?

I started with the *Sunday PUNCH*, which was less than six months old when I joined, and it was a very small team.

What year precisely did you join?

That was in 1973. Sunday PUNCH started in March of that year, and I joined six months later. I met like five people on the team, and I fell in love with what they were doing. PUNCH wasn't like other newspapers. It was different. There were more feature stories, interesting interviews, and stories that people loved to read.

Also, PUNCH, at that time, didn't tolerate laziness. I remember Baba Sam Amuka would always tell us not to come near the office if we didn't have anything to do in the office. He would tell us to rather go into the field to look for stories.

It would be very difficult to work in PUNCH then if you were not productive.

What was the sum of your experience while you worked with PUNCH?

The totality of my experience was a good one, especially for a young person like me to work in PUNCH at the time I did. It sharpened me and shaped up my career. It made me a much better journalist and person in general.

Did you retire there?

No, I left in 1984 as the Editor, Sunday PUNCH. I left for Vanguard Newspapers to become the pioneer editor. So, I was the very first editor of Vanguard.

What do you recall to be your most interesting time working with the Sunday PUNCH?

I was a staff writer for The PUNCH and Sunday PUNCH for a couple of years. I used to write a column for Sunday PUNCH, and I specialised on conducting interviews.

My highlight would be some of the interviews I did. I enjoyed the column so much because it allowed me to travel and explore other parts of the country. It also made me to be bold because ordinarily, I'm a very shy person. After a while, I perfected the style of conducting great interviews, and it became really comfortable for me.

However, when I started as a young journalist and was handling a page, I would go out and speak with 13 or more people on a trending issue, and I would return to the office and write something on it. From there, my editor gave me the opportunity to conduct bigger interviews. There was a day I met a former Head of Service and interviewed him. The Editor liked it and said he was going to give me a full interview column, and that was how the interview column started.

I travelled to Kenya at some point, and when I returned, I did my report, and the late Chief Olu Aboderin liked it so much and told me that I would be travelling more.

That was how I began to travel to many countries to do the job. If an organisation wanted to do something outside of the country and they needed to invite the PUNCH, they would send me the invite. By the time I was 26 years old, I had been across the five continents of the world except Australia.

I was the one who wrote the article when PUNCH became one, and I also wrote another piece when PUNCH clocked five years on the newsstands.

What fundamentals would you say helped to better shape your career as a young journalist?

My boss used to read some international newspapers, and he would pass them on to me to

read when he was done. I remember when he read an interview conducted by a journalist on the Egyptian Prime Minister at the time, and he said he was sure I would have done a better interview.

All those things helped and encouraged me. Most importantly, reading and learning different writing styles from whatever I read also helped me. Over time, I developed my own style of conducting interviews, and after a while, I became more comfortable conducting interviews. I'm good at conducting both formal and informal interviews.

What would you say is the difference between practising journalism now and how it was in your time?

I'm from a different generation, so I really can't say much about the journalism of now, today. But what I can say is that it's now a lot easier than before.

Now, computers are used to plan pages. If there is an overmatter, it can be compressed. If there is an undermatter, it can be expanded. It was not like that in our days.

We didn't have all these opportunities now available to young journalists of today.

That time, we would study how many words would fill up a page and write to suit that. There was no avenue for errors or slacking. Journalism then was more difficult. You had to be technical if you're in production, unlike now that you have many options and applications to rely upon for your work.

Also, sending stories from outside Lagos was more difficult. The telephone was a luxury, much less the Internet.

Things around balancing the headlines and all that should be easier now. I see a lot of planning, especially for features and interviews, and I cringe. There is no space for the page to breathe, most times. I'm sure that that's part of the problem that we have now.

The truth is that it's a lot easier to practice journalism now, which has made the standard drop. Also, I don't think we have enough gatekeepers like

we had in those days. Every journalist's work had to go through the hands of these gatekeepers. They'd check for grammar, spelling, and conformity to house style.

There are some stories I read, and I don't find the basic five W's and H - the where, when, what, why, who, and how. These things are the basic things the readers want to know.

And then, of course, backgrounding stories and the like have also taken the backseat. How can you be writing about a football match and assume your readers know about the club playing or the league itself?

There was one particular time I was following a particular tennis game. They had finished the tennis match the previous day but a newspaper was announcing that the match would be played the next day.

I had to call the editor, who was my friend, and he apologised and promised to do better. I just think journalism is way easier now and should be practised better.

Now, everybody claims to be a journalist; everyone has a blog. How can you say you are a journalist without going through a school of journalism? Some of them even teach journalism without going through the school of journalism. It is laughable.

If you were not a journalist, what would you have been?

I love writing a lot. I was writing for free anyway before joining PUNCH. I still have a column in Vanguard. I write every week for Vanguard; my column comes out on Saturdays. So, that helps me keep abreast of the happenings around me.

• *Extracted from Our Punch Years, edited by Lekan Otufodunrin*

I DON'T THINK WE HAVE ENOUGH GATEKEEPERS LIKE WE HAD IN THOSE DAYS. EVERY JOURNALIST'S WORK HAD TO GO THROUGH THE HANDS OF THESE GATEKEEPERS. THEY'D CHECK FOR GRAMMAR, SPELLING, AND CONFORMITY TO HOUSE STYLE



• Adetiba



• Bello

We closed gap of tribalism, sited projects evenly across Kogi – *Former Governor, Bello*

Reflecting on your tenure as governor, what would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment and why?

Infrastructure was perhaps my greatest accomplishment, followed by security of lives and properties in the State. Put simply, I was able to accomplish the mandate given to me, which is to be a Governor for all Kogites and to make tangible differences in the lives of the people.

People still can't believe the massive strides of my Administration in the development of infrastructure in all sectors and parts of the state. So, in terms of accomplishments, infrastructure is it for me. Every part of Kogi State has legacy projects in education, healthcare, and other sectors. In line with the New Direction Blueprint we gave to ourselves, our aim was 'accelerated and proportional development of Kogi State in all the constituencies' - and that guided us in giving appointments and distributing projects. Every part got its due share based on size and need.

But perhaps the most important accomplishment was for me to be able to facilitate unity and equity among Kogites. Kogi was much divided at the time we took over the governance of the state due to past practices of disclusion and marginalization of some parts. So, I was intentional in building bridges and fostering unity. I had the most diverse team ever in the history of governance in the State and leveled the playing field for all demographics across tribes, religions, genders, ages and physical ability.

I invested so much in cooperation and integration among my people, making sure that bigotry and tribalism would have no place in the State under my leadership from Kogi East to Kogi Central to Kogi West. Now, the people of Kogi State know that good governance is not tribalistic. Bad governance doesn't spare anyone. Looking back, that is my biggest joy.

Can you discuss a specific challenge or crisis you faced during your time in office and how you handled it?

Shortly after taking over from my predecessor, I

invited my State Security Adviser for us to chart a robust security architecture. Of course, we were to look at the situation we inherited and how we wanted to ensure security in the state. The figures I saw and the stories behind those figures were alarming. Kogi was drifting towards becoming the crime capital of Nigeria. It was the most insecure state outside the Boko Haram-ravaged North East. Terrorist groups had cells in the State. Kidnapping was rife as well as armed robbery, including bank robberies. I looked at my State Security Adviser and told him to roll his sleeves. I told him I wasn't elected to give excuses and I won't join the escape route of running to Abuja periodically to paint a picture of hopelessness.

I was determined to win the war against insecurity, so what did I do? I ensured provision of patrol vehicles and security gadgets as well incentives that would spur security operatives to key into my vision of a safe and peaceful Kogi State. I also brought in technology heavily. I won't speak extensively about them as they are still being used by my successor. I also knew I had to lead the battle from the front. So I started from my Senatorial District so no one would think they could enjoy protection because I am their brother. We pulled down houses built from proceeds of crime, got terrorists and criminals arrested and took the fight to them. I led many operations at night. I didn't sleep so that the people of Kogi could enjoy sound sleep at night. I was elected to serve them. It paid off, and today, Kogi is one of the safest states in Nigeria.

Again, our major success factor was that we did not politicize criminality. I led from the front and I made crime unattractive. Indeed, I thoroughly disincentivised it by making sure that any would be criminal knew clearly that choosing a life of crime in Kogi State was ultimately a choice between losing life or liberty because it would definitely end in one or the other for them. I created opportunities for the youth and I brought in technology. Let me thank Kogites for standing

behind me to rescue our dear state from the cesspit of criminality.

How did you prioritise budget allocations during your term, and what impact did those decisions have on the state's economy and infrastructure?

To solve the problem of insecurity, we deployed both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. One of the non-kinetic approaches was to educate our teeming youth population and get them engaged. So, I decided to invest heavily in education. It was number one on our thematic areas. Our biggest strength is our youthful population and our future depends on how we shape them today. We embarked on massive provision of modern schools at the primary school level and brought a lot of reforms to the State Primary Education Board. We also invested in building model secondary schools with state of the art facilities to dismantle the dominance of private schools in the state. We employed qualified teachers and before I left office, we started paying for all of their internal and external examinations. The GYB Model Primary School in Adankolo has no match in Lokoja. Apart from the architectural masterpiece, digital library and excellent laboratories; it can conveniently sit 600 students for CBT at a go. We replicated that in many places across the State. Today, the Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba and the Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja are wearing a new look. The Kogi State School of Nursing, Obangede and the School of Health Technology, Idah are beautiful to behold. My administration also established two State Universities, Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara and Kogi State University, Kabba. When I went for Matriculation at KSU, Kabba, I discovered there were more Igalas there than Okun. That was the state I left behind. We are one people. We are united. We surpassed the UNESCO benchmark on education. We hit 30% of the entire budget before I left office. That was how

important we treated education. We also invested heavily in healthcare delivery and other capital infrastructure. The Ganaja Junction was notorious for creating traffic logjam. We built a flyover, the first in the history of our state, to solve that problem. Our roads are in excellent shape and we also established one of the best rice mills in Nigeria at Ejiba. I can go on and on. But in summary, we faced education, healthcare, agriculture, road infrastructure, security, information infrastructure and many others. And my joy is that my administration won so many awards in transparency and accountability.

What initiatives did you implement to address issues related to education, healthcare, and social welfare within the state?

I had spoken about this earlier. But let me be a bit expansive here. The GYB Blue Revolution was to create an environment for primary school children to be attracted to education. We built blocks of classrooms in every Ward across the State. We also built Model Secondary Schools and declared free education. Imagine attending a beautiful, well equipped and well staffed school for free. CUSTECH was established to bake out competent and quality science and technology professionals to solve Nigeria's problems. Our target was to produce

professionals to man Ajaokuta Steel and other big companies across the State. KSU Kabba was to create equity and fairness. In healthcare, building and equipping the best hospitals wasn't going to be enough. Will the people be able to afford their services? So what we did was to launch what we called BelloCare as well as the Kogi State Health Insurance Scheme to enable the poor afford world class health services. Our agenda was to protect the poor while providing first class health services to Nigerians. Some of our hospitals have the best equipment in the country. So we followed our commitment. Some called my administration Stomach Infrastructure Administration. As we were building schools, hospitals and constructing roads, we didn't lose sight of the need to provide for the basic needs of the poor. A government that doesn't protect the poor is just a bush bar for the rich. Looking back today, I am satisfied.

Transparency and accountability are crucial in public office. How did you ensure transparency in your administration, particularly regarding financial matters and decision-making processes?

When we came on board, one of the first things we did was to strengthen our procurement processes. We also empowered the Auditor General's office to ensure probity and accountability. We solidified our inbuilt mechanism to fight corruption. My officials knew I had zero tolerance for corruption. Those who thought they could beat the system were shown the way out. I was committed to fulfilling my promise to the people that their resources would work for them rather than landing in a few pockets. I am proud of the fact that the World Bank and other national and international organizations gave us awards as the most transparent State Government in Nigeria.

Infrastructure development is often a key focus for governors. What major infrastructure projects were initiated or completed under your leadership, and what impact did they have on the state's development?

Our infrastructure spans all sectors and is everywhere in the state today. Schools, hospitals, roads and many others. We have some ongoing projects too that my successor will complete. Most of our projects were completed. The



• Bello

WE SOLIDIFIED OUR INBUILT MECHANISM TO FIGHT CORRUPTION. MY OFFICIALS KNEW I HAD ZERO TOLERANCE FOR CORRUPTION. THOSE WHO THOUGHT THEY COULD BEAT THE SYSTEM WERE SHOWN THE WAY OUT

GYB Model Science Secondary School, Adankolo is a masterpiece. The Reference Hospital, Okene is one of the best in Nigeria. The road that covered about four Local Government Areas in Kogi East is about 56 kilometers. How many can I mention? We came, we saw and we delivered to the glory of the Almighty Allah.

How did you work with the state legislature and other stakeholders to pass key legislation and advance your policy agenda?

The synergy was the best in the history of the state. The State House of Assembly Members knew that we were all working for the greatness of the state. There was separation of powers and mutual respect. They performed their oversight to also put Government Officials on their toes. I must thank them for their support. They were about to pass so many bills into law. In putting our policies together, we were constantly engaging the stakeholders. The policies were about the people so we saw the need to listen to them. You can't shave my head at my back. We are their servants. And they usually take ownership of the policies and projects. We signed up to open governance because we had nothing to hide. Our books are constantly checked by those constitutionally empowered to do so and we ensured transparency. I enjoyed my eight years thoroughly as Kogites are wonderful people.

Can you discuss any instances where you had to navigate political differences or conflicts within your own party or with opposing parties, and how you approached those situations?

Of course, diplomacy and consensus building are very important parts of politics. As the leader of the party, they have so much trust in my sense of judgement. I listened to them also and respected superior opinions. So together, we were able to turn APC to a fortress. Sometimes, I also reached out to opposition leaders to preach the Kogi Agenda to them. That was the reason opposition parties were depleted ahead of the November 2023 Guber poll in the state. The key thing is for the people to trust you to be fair.

Economic development is a priority for every state. What strategies did you employ to attract investment, promote job growth, and foster economic prosperity during your tenure?

I set up an Economic Team and later, the Kogi State Economic Advisory Council. Kogi is blessed with some of the best brains around the world. We created a platform to galvanize them to give back to their State. Because we were able to secure our state and also ensure a favourable tax administration, it was easy to attract investments into the state. We also empowered our farmers with our Agricultural Support Policies as well as Small and Medium Scale Enterprises. We have also initiated moves to see how we can benefit from the abundant natural resources in the state. Kogi's economy is healthy.

Looking back, what would you identify as areas where your administration could have improved, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

I would have loved to invest more than I did in agriculture. We started that a bit late and also getting the best out of our mineral resources. I have given my advice to my successor in the hand-over document and in the 32-Year Development Plan I bequeathed to the State. Kogi can be greater than it is now and we laid the foundation for that. I am confident that my successor, His Excellency, Alh Ahmed Usman Ododo, will surpass my achievements.

What is next for GYB?

Rest. Being a Governor is a 24/7 job. Constantly being on call of duty for eight years straight is massively stressful and draining. I intend to rest until I am fully rested. I am also paying attention to the State of the Nation, and I remain a stalwart of the ruling APC as well as a foot-soldier of His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. My considerable skills and experience remain at the service of my country. Definitely, I will be serving Nigeria, in or outside the limelight.

I thank Punch for making me what I am

— Former Editor, Sunday PUNCH, Igbokwe

Igbokwe joined The Punch as a Senior Correspondent and was later promoted to Chief Correspondent, member of the Editorial Board, and Editor, Sunday Punch. He left the company in 2013 as a Senior Member of the Editorial Board. He is currently the Publisher/Editor-in-Chief of the News Probe online newspaper. He is also a columnist and visiting member of the Editorial Board of The Sun Newspaper

I joined The Punch Newspaper reluctantly in 2003. Reluctantly because it was my wife, Ifeoma, that actually pushed me into joining. I had been toiling dutifully as a senior correspondent of TheNews/Tempo magazines in Port Harcourt when a friend of mine, Mr Simon Utebor, drew my attention to the vacancy in The Punch. Utebor, who was a computer operator in the newspaper then, wanted me to help get a correspondent who will report for The Punch in Abia State and Owerri, the Imo State capital. It was when I was thinking aloud about whom to recommend that my wife intervened. "What about you? Are you saying you don't need the job?" she queried. I shut her down immediately. "I can't work in The Punch!" I retorted bluntly. My wife did not find it funny.

For more than one week, she kept on pestering me, asking when I would submit my application letter to The Punch. I would flare up each time she woke me up early in the morning asking if I had sent my application. I kept telling her that The Punch was a difficult place to work in and that the organisation was in the habit of sacking people anyhow; that it could hire you today and sack you tomorrow. "If they sack people anyhow, it's not for you. The problem you have is that you don't know your worth. You are not anybody and The Punch will not sack you," my wife said. Just to please the woman so she could leave me alone, I applied. After going through written and oral interviews, I was employed to work as a senior correspondent in Aba, the commercial capital of Abia State. That was in August 2003.

My first shock was the salary. It was almost five times higher than what I received in my previous organisation. The allowance I got for my one-month stay in Lagos for orientation was far higher than my salary in my previous place of work. After my orientation, I resumed work in Aba. I also shuttled between Aba and Umuahia, the Abia State capital. That was the first time my job would separate me from my young family who then stayed in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital. What I was doing then was to visit them every weekend and go back to Aba on Mondays. Then barely six months later, I was transferred to Lagos from Aba. That was precisely in March 2004. Then, my wife was heavily pregnant with our second child. Anger gradually built up in me. I called my wife and shouted, "You see what you have caused? When I told you I didn't want to work at The Punch, you didn't listen to me. Now, barely six months in Aba, they have transferred me to Lagos.

"You see what you have caused?" On hearing this, my wife started singing and praising God. "You must be out of your mind," I shouted. "They are separating me from you people, and you are happy!" The woman said calmly: "You will see what will happen to you. Now your star will shine. What are you even doing in the east? Lagos is where you are meant to be..." Well, since the person I thought would be sorrowful about my transfer was happy, what else would I do? I packed a few things inside my travel bag and headed for Lagos. I must say that I was fearful of Lagos, hearing all sorts of evil things allegedly happening there. I wondered how I would cope having not lived or worked in Lagos before. But when duty calls, you can't but obey. A few days in Lagos, I excelled and probably caught the eyes of my superiors, especially the then Chairman of the company, Chief Ajibola Ogunsola, who I learnt never joked with my articles. It wasn't long after that my desk started what was then called 'Page 4'. It was a popular personal finance page aimed

at educating Nigerians about personal finance and how to run their businesses successfully. I was told that Chief Ogunsola initiated this idea. Akeem Lasisi and I anchored the page. Later, Mr Adeyeye Joseph, who is now the Managing Director, joined us. I was the pillar that sustained that section of the paper for the length of time it lasted. That fetched me the FATE Foundation SME Journalist of the Year award in 2005. Later, the company published our articles in four volumes of a book. Also, in 2005, I won The Punch Employee of the Year award. I was given a gift (a big deep freezer) and my picture was hung in the lobby of the newspaper as was the practice then. In July of that same year, an opportunity came to travel to Cardiff, the capital of Wales in the United Kingdom for the British Council/ Cardiff University international colloquium on role of journalists in facilitating pluralist democracy in multi-cultural societies. The British Council contacted The Punch to select a good young journalist who would attend the programme in Cardiff. My editor then, Mr Azu Ishiekwe, and his deputy, Alhaji Yusuf Alli, did not have any trouble picking me. By then, I had never travelled outside Nigeria. I did not even have a passport. Azu derided me for not having a passport, and called his contact at the passport office to help facilitate it for me. That was how I found myself in Cardiff amid 13 other young journalists from different parts of the world. I was the only black African in their midst. The only other African country there was Egypt. We were on that programme for two weeks and I must say, it was the most memorable part of my life. When I returned, I got wind of the Chevening Scholarship, and I applied. And, I got it. In September 2006, I went back to the United Kingdom for my Master's degree in International Journalism at Cardiff University. I already knew the terrain, having visited the previous year. Things were just falling into pleasant places for me as my wife predicted.

During my studies in Cardiff, The Punch placed me on half salary. That was enough to take care of my family in Nigeria. I continued writing my back-page column then called, 'Musings from Cardiff', which became very popular. After my one-year study in Cardiff, I returned to The Punch. But, I did not go back to the newsroom anymore. I was posted to the Editorial Board, where I marked time, waiting for the next line of action. One day, I came to work and discovered that I was the only one in the office.

Shortly after I got there, the intercom in the editorial board rang. I picked it. The voice at the other end asked about the chairman of the editorial board. He was not around.

He asked about his deputy. He too was not available.

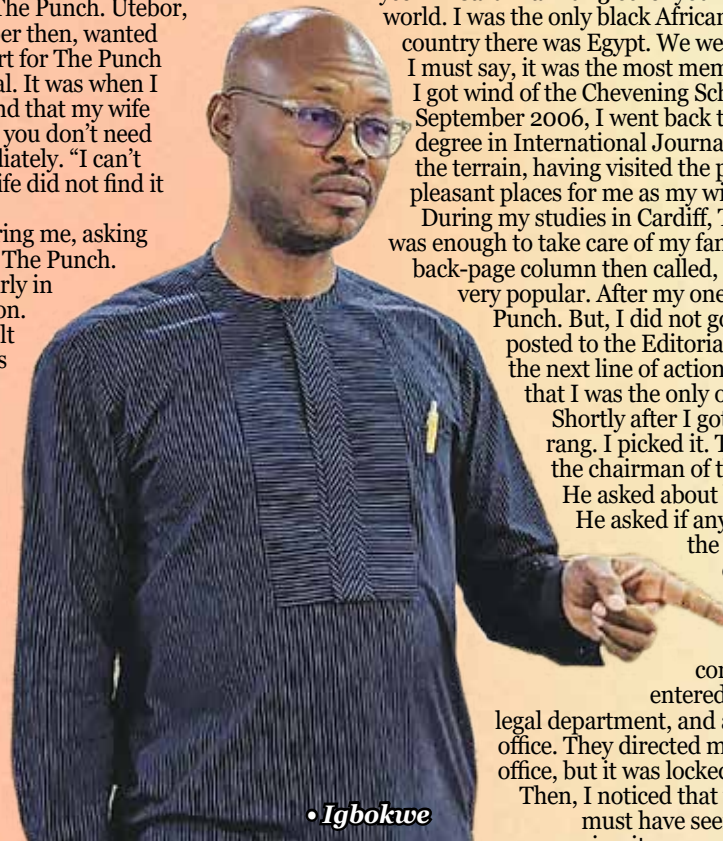
He asked if any other person was there. I answered in the negative. The person then ended the call. He called back two minutes after

and said I should come to the office of the Chairman of the company. I got confused. Who could be asking me to come to the Chairman's office? I had not entered that office before. So, I first entered the legal department, and asked them to show me the chairman's office. They directed me. I tried to first enter his secretary's office, but it was locked.

Then, I noticed that the chairman's direct door was ajar. He must have seen the confusion in me from his closed-circuit camera and opened the door with a remote control. I knocked gently. "Please enter," he said. I went in, and he asked me to sit down. We started chatting like father and son. He asked me all sorts of questions and I answered to the best of my knowledge. He praised my column and asked me some questions concerning some topics I wrote about. We had that conversation for over one hour. I did not know I was being interviewed. When I was going, he said he would recommend me for the position of news editor if there was an opportunity for that. I believed they were considering me for the position of a news editor when the then-editor of Sunday Punch, Mr Simon Ekpe, had an accident. That was how I began my journey as acting editor of Sunday Punch in 2008. Mr Ekpe was away from work for about three months. When he resumed, he waited to be recalled to his post. But, he was asked to rest for a while. Eventually, they posted him to the editorial board and asked me to continue as Editor of Sunday Punch. I was editor until 2012 when I lost my father. Soon after I came back from the burial, I was redeployed to editorial board as a senior member. Then, Ogunsola had retired as chairman. It was then I started thinking of my exit from the organisation.

I voluntarily left The PUNCH in January 2013 in pursuit of other life endeavours. But my Punch years remain the best for me. The newspaper strives for excellence, creditability and transparency. It rewards hard work and does not condone indolence and corruption. It sent many of us to Lagos Business School for some tutorials on basic economics and financial appreciation. It conducted tests in the English language and occasionally weeded out those who could not measure up. That is why the newspaper remains the best in Nigeria. I remain ever grateful to the newspaper for making me what I am today.

• Extracted from *Our Punch Years*, edited by Lekan Otufodunrin



• Igbokwe

MY FIRST SHOCK WAS THE SALARY. IT WAS ALMOST FIVE TIMES HIGHER THAN WHAT I RECEIVED IN MY PREVIOUS ORGANISATION

Punch: 40 years after, The PUNCH still home to me — *Former Editor, The PUNCH Adikwu*



◦ Adikwu

My journalism practice started in 1971 when I was employed as a reporter by the New Nigerian— a northern region tabloid based in Kaduna State. It was a prestigious media organisation and I was happy there. In 1974, I was sent to the Nigerian Institute of Journalism in Lagos for a three-month course in News Reporting. That was my first visit to Lagos, the Federal Capital of Nigeria then. It took a visit to the Daily Times of Nigeria office at Kakawa Street, Lagos, to change my perception of the best place to practise journalism in Nigeria. It was not Kaduna, but Lagos, where almost 80 per cent of newspapers in Nigeria were circulated. Most of the advertisements that sustained the operation of newspapers came from Lagos as well. However, I returned to Kaduna at the end of my course with a distinction certificate in News Reporting from the NIJ. I expected to be rewarded with a promotion. That didn't happen when state editors were appointed. Instead, some journalists, whose performances at NIJ didn't come close to mine, received promotions. I was discouraged and concluded it was time to move on. I joined a new newspaper organisation in Lagos— The Mercantile Press— as their Chief Correspondent in Kaduna. The move proved to be a game-changer. That organisation soon moved me to Lagos, which opened a vista of opportunities for me in journalism. In those pre-Internet days, those who made the fastest progress in journalism included sub-editors. Unlike reporters and feature writers, their names did not ring a bell. Nevertheless, their role in newspaper production was strategic and definitive. At the Mercantile Press, I was introduced to sub-editing and that gave me a solid foundation for my future in journalism, including my almost eight years at Punch Nigeria Limited.

Timeline of my Punch days:

I was employed as a Sub-Editor on April 23, 1976, and eventually confirmed as the substantive Editor of The Punch on July 21, 1982. I resigned from Punch Nigeria Limited in December 1983.

My recollections:

The editorial department of The PUNCH was unique. Unlike the New Nigerian, where bosses were detached and unsociable, at this new organisation, we related seamlessly with our directors. Perhaps, that was because, rather than being appointed, these were owners of the newspaper, more interested in the progress of the newspaper than any other consideration. The diversity of the boardroom was also a factor. Sam Amuka-Pemu, the Managing Editor, oversaw the editorial department. He was a prolific journalist who stood for excellence in journalism. You won him over naturally with catchy headlines, attractive page layouts and, of course, good write-ups. He was apolitical, and he insisted stories be balanced.

Somehow, it was easy to feel that Amuka was the one who ensured that journalists were rewarded for excellence and well-treated by the management. There has been no place like The PUNCH. During my early days at The

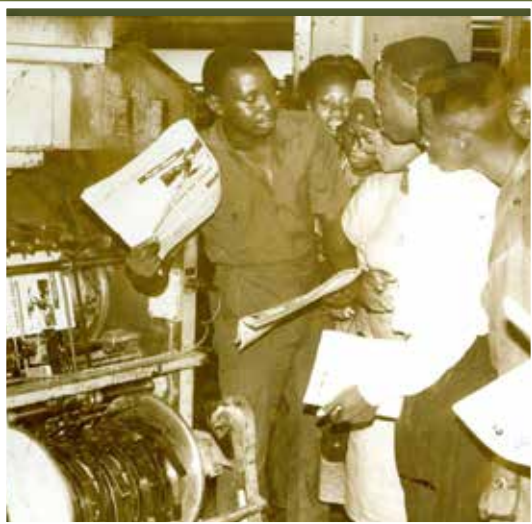
Chief Innocent Adikwu, a former Deputy Editor, Sunday PUNCH; Editor, Sunday PUNCH, and Editor, The PUNCH, is presently a Media Consultant with the National Emergency Management Agency, and Managing Director of Otada Health Foods Limited

PUNCH Newspaper, I had a misunderstanding with Amuka, and I overreacted. I stormed out in anger. The next day, I secured a job as a Senior Sub-Editor (a step higher than my then position) with the Daily Times. The late Tony Momoh was the Editor. I felt at home in Daily Times, too. However, I ended up not staying long there, because Sam turned on his charm. He called me and asked for reconciliation. I remember him telling me that if friends quarrelled, they ought to reconcile. I was touched by his magnanimity and humility. I apologised to Tony Momoh and returned to The PUNCH. Not long after, I was moved up to Deputy Editor of the Sunday PUNCH. Six months later, I was promoted to Editor of the Sunday PUNCH, the third person to hold the enviable position since the inception of the newspaper. I held sway for four years. The daily edition— The PUNCH— had been launched while I was the editor of the Sunday edition. I felt greatly honoured and recognised when on May 6, 1982, I was appointed Editor of The PUNCH, after Mr Sola Odunfa and Mr Tayo Kehinde, respectively.

Also, I was the third to edit The PUNCH daily edition. I need to add that between my editorship of the Sunday PUNCH and The PUNCH, the newspapers offered balanced coverage of two presidential elections of 1979 and 1983 respectively, despite the fanatically partisan politics of those days. Political parties of that era were Unity Party of Nigeria (of Chief Obafemi Awolowo), National Party of Nigeria (of Alhaji Shehu Shagari), Nigerian People's Party (of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe), Great Nigerian People's Party (of Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim), Nigerian Advance Party (of Dr Tunji Braithwaite).

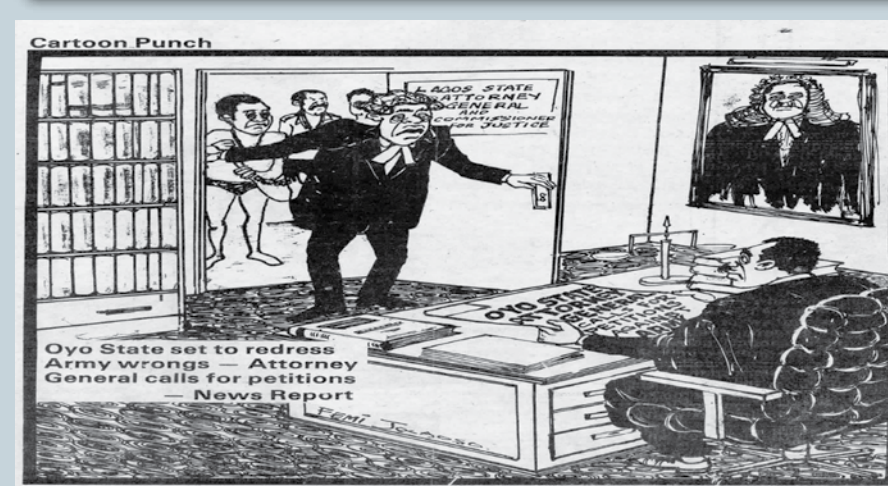
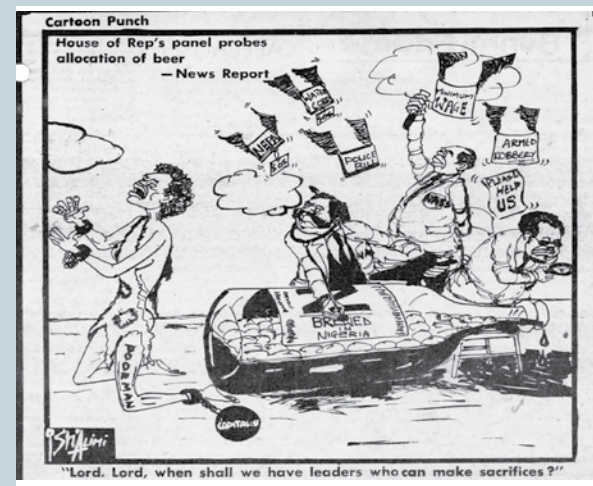
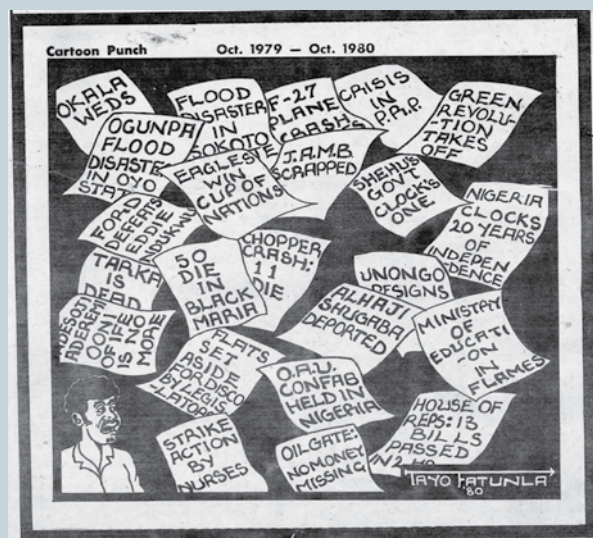
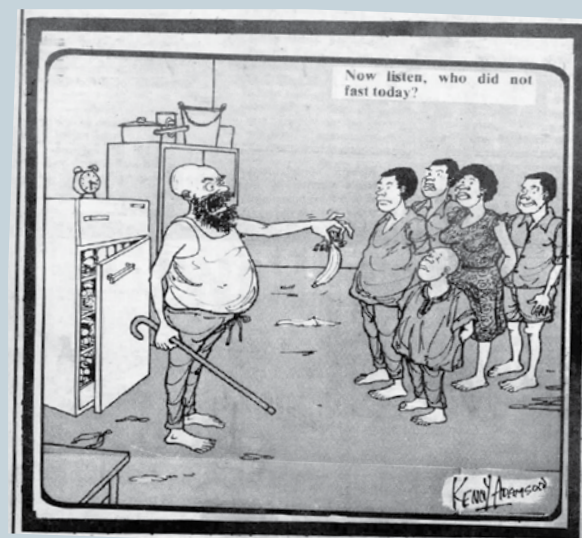
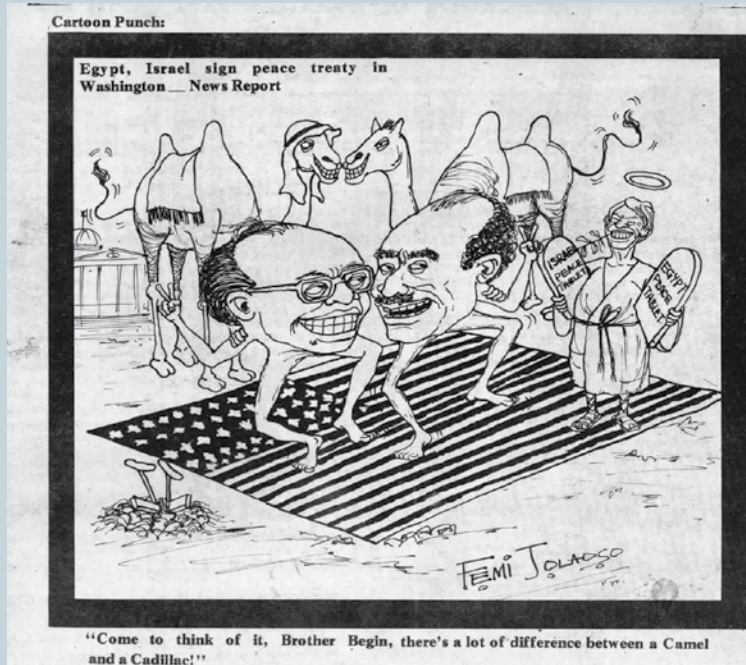
How did we manage to maintain neutrality in the coverage of the fractious politics of the 1970s and 1980s? The PUNCH management was dominated by UPN fans, being Yoruba like the party's founder. However, they wanted The PUNCH Newspapers to excel. The Punch, going by circulation figures, was only second to Daily Times then. Above all, you needed adverts to sustain the progress being made, and being flagrantly partisan would make the newspaper less attractive to discerning advertisers. The Managing Editor, Sam Amuka, a non-Yoruba man, who had the final say about the editorial content of the newspapers, was independent. Notwithstanding, striking a balance was not easy. Being from the north, as the editor, I must have been perceived as an NPN sympathiser. I made a joke about that a lot. If anybody branded me NPN, I would reply that the person was also in UPN: No crime, no offence! The best approach then was to give prominence to all the political parties in our coverage of their campaigns with the caveat that reactions from the other parties would be given equal prominence. It worked. My team committed to achieving the balance by reaching out to all the parties equally. The PUNCH editorial team was a mix of young men and women from different parts of the country. I was younger than most of them. From the reminiscences of many of my colleagues then, they were overwhelmed by my generosity in sharing ideas, mentoring in newspaper production and supporting them in their times of need. I was privileged and I was open about it. I had many prominent and wealthy people as friends, including the likes of the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola, Engineer Oshurinde, late Senator Mahmoud Waziri, Senator Uba Ahmed, and a host of others. My rich friends were known to the management. Indeed, it was the late Chairman of The Punch, Chief James Aboderin, who introduced Abiola to me when, on a fateful day, he brought the millionaire businessman to my office. We became close friends thereafter.

My days at The PUNCH were fulfilling. When I joined the newspaper as a sub-editor in 1976, I did not expect to get the topmost positions amid the southerners, who had a rich history of excellence and dominance in journalism. However, once I got in, it became clear to me the difference between The Punch and the New Nigerian. At The PUNCH, there was an unflinching pursuit of excellence, and any performance that enhanced the quality of the newspaper was rewarded, regardless of tribe, religion and political leaning of the journalist. That was why I could make history as the first person from the northern part of the country (Benue State) to be appointed to the prestigious positions of Editor of Sunday PUNCH and The PUNCH respectively. The PUNCH credential is invaluable to me. We are blessed that the newspaper has not only survived but also thrived. Imagine me showing off my pedigree as a former editor of The PUNCH. A former editor of the Daily Times, with all the fame of yesteryear, would not get the same recognition because that newspaper has become defunct. It is not surprising that 40 years after I exited The PUNCH, it still feels like home to me. Whenever we, its veterans, meet or chat, the memories are still fresh. We connect on Facebook, WhatsApp and other informal platforms. For some of us, there has been no place like The Punch. I have been a media consultant for the National Emergency Management Agency for almost 10 years, and the National Agency for the Control of AIDS; but the nostalgic feelings for those organisations cannot match what I feel for The PUNCH. I remain very proud of my Punch heritage.



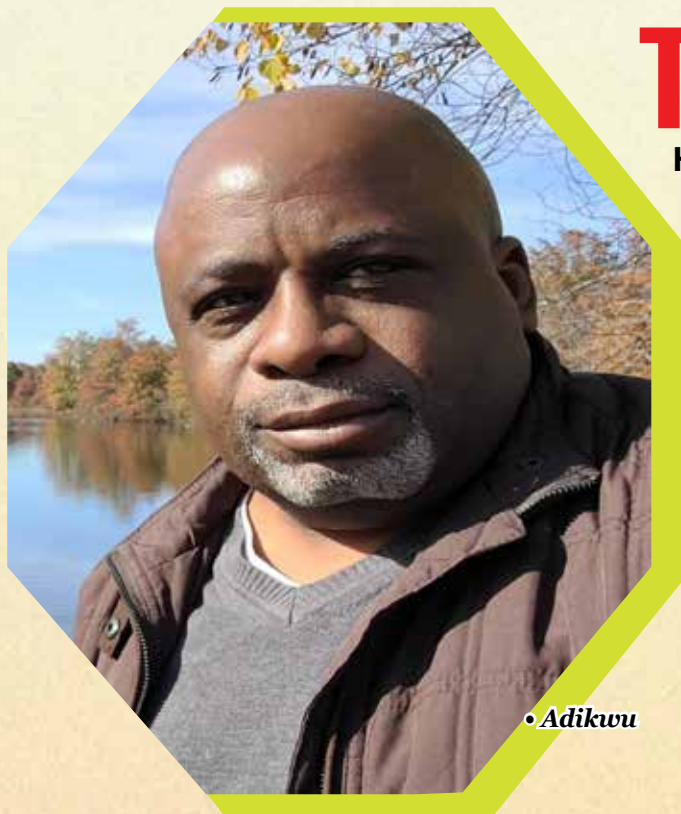


PUNCHY CARTOONS



My years in Punch spent on battlefield

— Ex-Abuja Bureau Chief, Odediran



• Adikwu

Tunde Odediran joined The Punch Newspapers in April 1994 as News Editor. He held other positions, including Assistant Editor, The Punch; Acting Editor, Sunday Punch; and Editor, Abuja Bureau. He left Punch in October 1996. He is a columnist for The Interview online publication, a co-founder of the nonprofit, Rescue Nigeria and is now in Information Technology, employed at a global customer relationship management software company

My years at The Punch were spent on the battlefield to save democracy and the freedom of the press in Nigeria. They were also years of punishment for following one's conviction by engaging brutal military leaders in the fierce struggle for political freedom and human rights. One of the most fearless journalists I know— Bola Bolawole— hired me at The Punch Newspapers Limited in the heat of the most hotly-contested election in Nigeria's history—the June 12, 1993 election— won by the late business magnate and owner of Concord Press Limited, M.K.O. Abiola. It was annulled by his friend and power-thirsty military dictator, General Ibrahim Babangida.

Before arriving at The Punch newsroom, I was a news rewriter at Abiola's National Concord. The paper had already suffered from being shut down. Staff, too, suffered a loss of salary in the immediate aftermath of the annulment. Having decided that the Concord Newspapers Group was too deeply mired in politics, I sought sanity at The Punch as the News Editor in April, 1994, after a successful written test and interview. Punch, as a newspaper group, took its social and professional responsibilities seriously. Before National Concord, I had rated Punch Newspapers as too soft on issues. From the inside, I saw a media group in phases of metamorphosis from predominant human-interest reporting to hard issues reporting. By 1993, The Punch had taken the lead in the fight for freedom from military rule. The principled stance of the leadership and ownership of the newspaper gained wide respect. The Punch built a reputation as the newspaper of the people, for the people. By the time I joined, it had earned a reputation as the widest-circulating newspaper nationally. Punch Newspapers fought a good fight. To this day, it remains my honour and privilege to have worked among such a team of principled and hardworking journalists, at a time when ordinary men bowed to power and ignored the common good for want of personal comfort.

In a sense, my move to The Punch was just an extension of the same battle that I had left behind at National Concord. All it took me to return to the battleground was two months of normal journalism at The Punch. In June 1994, one year after the dastardly cancellation of the freest and most credible election in Nigeria, The Punch came under the attack of the military regime for its bold reporting of events that the soldiers wanted hidden from the public. By this time, I was an Assistant Editor of The Punch. Daily, we kept playing the hide-and-seek, hit-and-run game with the military, doing our jobs as best as we could, knowing that General Sani Abacha's regime was looking for scapegoats, as Abiola stubbornly clung to his mandate and enjoyed irrepressible media sympathy. As Nigeria further slid into instability under Abacha, the face-off came to a head. On June 11, 1994, armed policemen swarmed the newspaper's premises at Mangoro-Ikeja, effectively aborting production as they drove out workers and sealed up the estate. The Punch Daily Editor, Bolawole, was placed under 'office arrest'. A day before, an unknown biker had dropped an envelope at the gate, containing an invitation purportedly from MKO Abiola, signalling his intention to declare himself as President at the Gateway Hotel in Ota, Ogun State. The envelope was received by the secretary to the daily editor. The invitation became the main subject of the editorial meeting that day. We decided that journalism had to operate without fear, and the event would be reported exactly as it unfolded. I was given the assignment of putting the story together. Working with one of the most experienced reporters— Churchill Umoren— we curated and packaged the report as accurately as possible, following the chronology of events. It was the lead story in the next day's edition. It was also an invitation to trouble. Bolawole would later narrate, "They said the security report was that a top-notch at The Punch was the brain behind the Abiola Invitation Card and Presidential Declaration; that he brought the IV to The Punch and used his privileged position to get it published. I told them

that I had no such information.

"That IV was a first-class news item by any standard, and no editor worthy of the name will hesitate to slam it on the cover. They brought out a prepared statement for me to sign, stating that the IV was brought by the top oga (boss). I refused to sign. They put a pistol to my nose and rudely threw screaming Moji out. The pistol's nozzle was as cold as a dog's nose. I closed my eyes and said my prayers, but refused to sign. They threatened that the death meant for the boss would be mine. I didn't budge. Some of the goons eventually went away for further directives."

Three days after being subjected to an uncommon treatment in lone detention in The Punch premises, Bolawole was moved to the Criminal Investigation Department at the Nigeria Police Force headquarters at Alagbon, Lagos. He was not to be released until Umoren and I were interrogated about the story. Some seemingly smart policemen, helplessly caught in the line of ugly duty, asked questions but they were sympathetic to the MKO cause from their scrutable countenance. After a few hours of rambling, they released us. The late human rights lawyer, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, took up The Punch's case at the Ikoyi Federal High Court. I remember the calmness in the courtroom on the morning of July 1994, when Justice T.A. Oduunowo ordered the vacation of our premises by the military with some compensation for the economic losses suffered by the business. It was a sweet victory, which soon left a bitter taste. The awards were never honoured and the junta's reaction brought hardship. With The Punch premises still occupied, the newspaper went underground, publishing from outside its facilities, the news magazine, Top Life. The Managing Director, Mr Demola Osinubi, and Bolawole, tried to bring energy to the cause. However, when they did, the monster became vicious. The Abacha regime unleashed brutality. The Punch, The Guardian and National Concord were prohibited from publishing. All three publications of Punch Newspapers Limited— The Punch, Sunday Punch, and Top Life— were proscribed by military decree. The Punch Newspapers (Proscription and Prohibition from circulation) Decree No. 7, the Concord Newspapers and African Concord, House of Heroes Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 6, and The Guardian Newspaper and African Guardian Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 8, all of 1994, were effective and enforced by the sealing of the premises of the newspaper companies. It marked the start of my saddest moments at The Punch. After a few weeks, the financially-crushed organisation could not continue to pay its staff without earning revenue. Although a handful of staffers were retained to ensure the continuity of the business, most of our colleagues went into a year of penury and hardship, while others took temporary jobs elsewhere to keep body and soul together. The company rented a small office half a kilometer from the premises, where we met daily to keep the business afloat. During this period, intimidation and hunting never stopped. Some of the journalists, myself included, continued to be harassed. A summons was dropped at the main office for me to appear before Justice Abdullahi Mustapha's court in Abuja for cases related to Abiola's declaration of victory. Abdullahi was one of the infamous judges used by the Abacha regime to wage its war on June 12. I simply ignored the summons on the advice of our lawyer. Ultimately, the newspapers were reopened. Having always been prepared, we quickly launched into an operational mode. Following a refresher training, we were able to go right back to work, with our heads held high. I became Acting Editor of Sunday Punch for a few months, before being shipped to Abuja to man the bureau right under the nose of the dictator. It was a dangerous time to be in Abuja as a journalist. Our office was the hub for journalists and security operatives alike at the time. We never feared; we never stopped writing truthful stories. At some point, I was asked to represent The Punch at a media owners' meeting at Aso Rock. Doubting I might return from the event, I nonetheless attended without fear. Some of our efforts and actions during the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha will never be recognised or remembered. However, I have to flag some of our staff in Abuja for acts of courage and good citizenship. The late Joel Gure, a man of unique character, was a dogged fighter. He gave the military a red nose. Chuks Ohuegbe and Farouk Audu-Adejoh fought a good fight. They covered historic events, including MKO Abiola's trials in Abuja, without fear.

Our advertising executive, Mrs Nike Adelegan, once became a reporter who smuggled a mini recorder on my behalf into the SSS's secret cell in Asokoro to interview the son of the late Supreme Court Judge, Emmanuel Ogebe, caught by Abacha doing civil advocacy work related to June 12. The Punch of those days was a house of heroes, a home to the courageous and a haven for the upright. I remain forever proud to have worked with such a bunch of fearless, principled, diligent and dogged fighters. Ultimately, I had to drop the pen to join my fiancée and start a new life in the United States of America late in 1996. In retrospect, I think that the frustration of seeing June 12 slowly melt away, as Nigerians moved on, got the better of me. Abacha was killing everyone who opposed him. George Orwell's classic work, 1984, found its personification in the Nigeria of 1996. Abuja was littered with Abacha's snitches and rats. I am forever grateful for the opportunity and the platform that The PUNCH provided. The experience I had in just those two-and-a-half years, among formidable fighters, accounts for the most eventful, exciting and memorable years of my journalism career. I would do it again—but I wish that moment never arose again in the life of the nation: military rule, never; freedom, forever!

Transcorp Hilton is the only five-star hotel in Nigeria

– President/Group CEO, Transcorp Plc, Omogiafo

President/Group CEO, Transcorp Plc, Owen Omogiafo, speaks on the remarkable strides of one of Nigeria's biggest conglomerate especially after the downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic in this interview with Adelani Adepegba and Princess Etuk

HOW has the conglomerate been coping with the prevailing economic headwinds, including forex challenges, and worsening volatility of the naira?

As with everybody, it's been a bit challenging. We are experiencing quite challenging times across the nation from the FX issue to inflation and, to some extent, the security challenges. But notwithstanding, we've done very well as a group. We have investments in recession-resilient sectors like our power investments. No matter what, you still need to provide power and get power across. So, our investment in that sector has continued to grow and create value. In our hospitality space, we've also seen tremendous growth because there is renewed interest in Nigeria and what Nigeria is doing. So, we see that there's a strong surge of international business travellers. As the world has returned to normal following the 2019/2020 COVID-19 pandemic, you find that a lot of airlines, practically all the airlines are back in Nigeria, barring Emirates. So, our hospitality business is doing very, very well. I'd say in total, the Conglomerate, leveraging the discipline and business model that we run, has effectively overcome and delivered successes despite the economic challenges that the nation is facing.

One of your subsidiaries, Transcorp Hotels, hit N1tn capitalisation on the capital market recently, share with us the journey to that milestone

Transcorp Hotels is a subsidiary we're very proud of and very happy with. Transcorp Hotels is a source of pride for me because, in a nutshell demonstrates the value and opportunities within our country, and is a clear example of "tough times don't last but tough people do". In 2020, with the pandemic, the iconic property was like a ghost town. That year, we actually posted a loss of nearly N10 billion, but we stood upon our resilient principle and continued to engage with our clients as if they were walking through the doors. So, we maintained top-of-mind awareness with our guests. We stayed connected with our staff and you know during COVID, everybody was fighting for their lives, but we were thinking of strategies of how once the COVID restrictions are lifted, we were just going to hit the markets. So, you see, once all those restrictions were lifted, we launched Aura by Transcorp Hotels in July 2021. Aura by Transcorp Hotels is a digital platform for booking homes, hotels, and experiences. We had revamped the hotel just before COVID, we completed the renovation of the hotel at about \$132 million; we've given facelifts to the facilities. If you go to Bukka, which is the main restaurant, there is a nice facelift. If you go to Pastry Corner, nobody will argue with you if you take a picture and say you're in a lively cafe somewhere in France. And of course, because our Gen Zs like their selfies, we had to redecorate our bathrooms. So, you go there and it's really beautiful. The women's bathroom is pink. So, we have created value and we continue to improve and enhance our service standards. You go downstairs into our restaurants, the quality of food, the distinction of excellence that comes with the service that you get. Once you drive into the Transcorp Hilton ... right from the gate, you have that sense of security. So, you're driving and you are enveloped with peace; then you walk through the door and you are hit with that very pleasant fragrance. Wear a trusted brand. And that value is what you have seen that has made the value of the stock rise because it has risen on the confidence of the investors and when you saw that the stock market was growing, Transcorp Hotels was right there at the forefront and our stock price just kept on growing and growing. For us as business owners, it is to ensure that we repay the confidence investors have reposed in us by building a business that is not just profitable, but that is operated sustainably and creates value for everyone.

Do you feel threatened by new hospitality firms aiming to displace your hotel from the pinnacle of the industry?

Well, in my position, I don't know who that is :)... But do we feel threatened? No, we don't feel threatened. You see, Nigeria has a lot of opportunities. If you look at it, how many five-star rooms do we have in Nigeria? Nigeria has just one five-star hotel as far as I'm concerned. And that is the Transcorp Hilton Abuja, which means that we have more than 670 5-star rooms. Compared to places like Dubai, London, and New York, we need to have more quality hotels. And the beauty of our place is that we've got almost 40 years of reinforced, sustained, trusted service. So, do I feel threatened? No. We need to be able to attract international conferences and to attract international conferences, you need a minimum of about 5,000 hotel rooms of the Transcorp Hilton standard. So,



• Omogiafo

if more properties open up, what does it mean? It is more opportunities because I know that for the discerning traveller, their first port of call would be the Transcorp Hilton Abuja before others are considered. And if there are more entrants, what does it mean for Nigerians? More job opportunities, more businesses and since for Transcorp, we are about improving lives and transforming Africa, we say welcome. Whatever will help to catalyze more industries, if a new hotel opens today, it's more jobs; direct jobs from the hotels, and indirect jobs from the vendors that will come up. I'm all for industrializing Nigeria.

Your conglomerate is involved in the energy sector of the economy, what are the challenges plaguing that sector and how has Transcorp been weathering the storm?

So, in looking at the energy sector, let's just go across the value chain. We've got the generating companies, we've got the transmission and the distribution. I would extend that value chain a little bit more, so you have a better understanding. If we look at the generation, the thermal, that is the gas plants, then the hydros inputs... right... and about 78 per cent of Nigeria's power comes from the thermal. So, the challenges that we've been seeing in the oil and gas sector, as you know, we've had diminished production in oil and gas, diminished production from infrastructural challenges, vandalism, outright theft, which led people to say "we need to take a break." It has impacted the supply of gas to our generating companies. If I pick my plant in Afam, I am generating about 30 to 40 per cent of my available

capacity right now because of some issues relating to gas availability in that area. So, if we have more gas, what it means is that we're able to generate more power. If you have more power, it can come through the transmission and get to the end-user at the other end of the value chain. You know we've recently invested in Abuja Electricity Distribution Company. Ultimately, it gets to the customer and the customer is meant to pay for the power that is received. But we have some challenges relating to electricity theft, bypass or people just not paying their bills, and nothing more or less happens. And when people don't pay their bills, you find that there are liquidity challenges in the system. And with the devaluation of the naira and the FX, we need to move towards a more cost-reflective tariff. Because as it is right now, the tariff that is being charged is not cost-reflective. But I also understand where the government is coming from and why they're trying to manage it because we are trying to stabilize the economy. Are there challenges in the sector? Yes! But one thing you find wherever challenges exist are opportunities, and the reality is that no matter the sector you are in, you need energy. And once there's always a market or a need for something, you will find that you're able to provide it and you provide value. More importantly is really what we stand for. There is no way we would not have been a key player in the energy market because it's quite capital-heavy. And it requires a lot of patience as well.

Given the Q3'23 results of the group, should shareholders be expecting improved dividends for FY 2023?

You know, I am a public company, so I cannot comment on dividends until we notify the board which will notify the public properly but this is what I said to my investors from time: We are committed to creating a company that our children's children would meet, that'll create value for everyone in the long term. And if you look through history, we've always paid dividends and as the company's fortunes have increased from the previous years, so has the dividend payout increased. But as you know, different things go into deciding what to pay. So, if you're doing some expansion now; let's look at Transcorp; we were working on renovating this hotel so it looks very beautiful. We've invested billions of naira to bring back the privatized assets. If you see that you have investments to make that year, it affects your decision on what you're going to do. But whatever decision you make, the shareholder is the ultimate beneficiary. If the turbines break down because you did not do the required maintenance, then what will you take tomorrow? We keep our shareholders happy today, but we also keep in view their long-term future.

Rising inflation has had a significant impact on the purchasing power of average Nigerians, any effect on your operations?

Way back like eight or so years ago, we started driving an import substitution strategy. It was a board mandate by saying that items that you guys import today, find local substitutes. Because we've had that kind of discipline, you'll find that for several things that we buy, we've already found local substitutes, which of course

now insulates us from these FX challenges. For the inflation side, I really want to appreciate our guests because they have that confidence in us. We've all been working towards it together, which is, we have our dynamic pricing. We are not trying to take advantage of anybody. But what we want is to make sure that the standard of quality remains and of course, drive strong operational excellence. We've been monitoring our risk level. So, now that is an issue, you will find that the discipline that you've started applying from the previous years, you are now benefiting a whole lot more. So when people are tightening their belts, our belts are already tight. We just keep on moving and moving on. On the power side of things, we're working a lot to see how to get as much as possible of our contracts in naira. Not always does it work because, you know, our OEMs are international. However, we're the only ones that don't have international technical partners anymore. We've now become 100 per cent Nigerian-run and managed. And we invested quite a lot in our staff to train them, empower them so they can do the work. But there are still times when we bring in external competence. There are some specialized tools that you need in the power sector that we have to bring in.

You won the All-Africa Businesswoman of the Year award in 2023 in recognition of the new heights of the group under your leadership. Could you share with us some of the successes?

When I became the Group CEO of Transcorp on March 25th, 2020, our stock price was 57 kobo and we closed 2023 at nearly N20 per share. Transcorp Hotels, ' stock price was N6. 25 but by the end of December, it was close to N100. That is tremendous growth. Through investments, we have grown our power presence very strongly. We were just previously in Ughelli, we've gone on to acquire Afam Power and we've also gone on to now do the Abuja Disco investment. We've also extended our reach by delivering power to Benin Republic. So through Transcorp and a few other Gencos, we are powering other African countries. So, when we say we are the giants of Africa, it is not a joke; it is the reality. Then our stakeholders' confidence; the Transcorp brand has grown quite tremendously. Thank you for the recognition of the awards, we give God all the glory. So Transcorp Plc, Transcorp Hotels, and Transcorp Power have won awards and recognition in different categories, both local and international. One of the awards that really pleased me was when we won the best company on diversity, equity and inclusion by Hofstede Insights and why it made me very happy is that it's quite a detailed index that they used. They came in and saw what we are doing and that people are seeing what we're doing, people are taking note and they're giving us that recognition. And perhaps, another high point was being invited to receive an award in London at the House of Lords. That was also another great moment. On my birthday, I got a present from the Federal Republic of Nigeria when I was awarded OON. We've improved our communication. Transcorp has been a very strong and good company, a strong brand. Since 2020, we've been more deliberate about telling our story. So, for example, me doing this kind of interview. Now, of course, I must thank PUNCH. PUNCH is one of the very first to publish I think a double-page interview on me. And that was also good in drawing attention to what we are doing, and people like success. The success stories of Transcorp in the past few years have been good and the corporate governance awards that we won also go a long way towards helping and people can see the impact. So, you talk to the communities within which we operate they are full of commendation for us. We talk to our staff, they are happy. So, investors' confidence are high, they recognize the corporate governance excellence that we have, our core value of enterprise execution and excellence. Our stakeholders believe in the people who are at the helm of affairs and Transcorp of course, is led by our Group Chairman, Mr Tony O. Elumelu, CFR.

One of your power subsidiaries Transcorp Power became the first privatised power business to be discharged from post-privatisation monitoring having surpassed all requirements set by the Bureau of Public Enterprise. What are the new frontiers for the business?

There's still a huge gap in the power sector. So, the first is really to be around optimizing our existing investment and getting into the renewable space. There's quite a lot of capital available for investments in the renewable space and Transcorp is a preferred partner for many international investors. We are exploring that space so we can get more power in and get power to the end user. As I mentioned earlier, our most recent investment is the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company. To see how to manage that business, and run it effectively because, without the distribution company, we really cannot deliver the power in a sustainable and meaningful manner. The national grid still has a whole lot to do as it relates to the movement of heavy power. In the



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WE ALSO HAVE THE LIBERALISATION OF MARKETS THROUGH THE STATE ELECTRICITY ACT. SO, STATES ARE NOW EMPOWERED TO LICENSE A GENERATION AND DISTRIBUTION COMPANY

past, there has been some discussion; even the Electricity Act that was recently signed, mentioned that as well, about the concession of the transmission company. If or when that happens, we would also be there to play that role? And like I said, Nigeria is a hub, we'll see as well how to expand that influence. Our neighbours that we share borders with, we see how we improve their power so that the prosperity that is emanating from Nigeria will reflect just the way the moon takes energy from the sun to shine.

Do you think Nigeria is attracting sufficient international investments in renewable energy?

I won't say it is not attracting it. Last year, I was in Saudi and one core message that came out is that developing countries need energy, full stop. Yeah, we need energy, we need power. We have huge hydrocarbon deposits. We have huge investments already in the power infrastructure that we run. Let me put this in context. If I were getting a new turbine today, I need to spend millions of dollars. So, think of all the millions of dollars that Nigeria and the rest of Africa have invested in their existing power infrastructure that they tie into the grid. Renewable energy is good because indeed, we have to supplement, we can't just focus on just one source of energy, because even for risk diversification, it is not ideal. But there are terms that they also put into it; you want to ensure that you have the right partner; we can't mortgage our future. Transcorp is here to be your conduit towards meeting those renewable targets, but at the same time, recognize that we run an energy blend, not necessarily energy replacement because we must energize Africa.

As a stakeholder in the power sector, what are

some of the far-reaching impacts of the Electricity Act 2023?

There are some key developments coming from the Act. One of the things I'm quite happy about is the establishment of a Community Development Fund that has come out. Mr Tony Elumelu is known for his philanthropy. So, we are built on the principle of 'do well, do good.' But for those other companies that may need an incentive to do good, this kind of platform is good because what it means is that you are now required by law to put aside a certain part of your money towards community development. We also have the liberalisation of markets through the State Electricity Act. So, states are now empowered to license a generation and distribution company. I said earlier that we have a gap in power supply and power distribution. There'll be more involvement by the state governments for power for their jurisdictions. And with more involvement comes more accountability. Ultimately, we need to build more industrial centres across Nigeria. And our dear regulator, NERC got some good powers. And in a sector like power, it's good to have a strong regulator that is clearly defined just like the way you have in banking. And there are also some things about the renewable energy space that would also work well for all of us. But first things first, it is even good there is something we can leverage on. It might not be implemented immediately, but there will be a direction towards implementation. Most delightful is the criminalization of electricity theft because we can no longer continue in that manner.

Ultimately, they said people will treat you the way you let them. Everybody is kind of recognizing that they have to hustle for themselves. Before the Act, some states were already moving on. If you look at Edo State, it has a gas supply somewhere and the governor attracted an investor to build a power plant. Look at Lagos; Lagos is moving quite ahead, they are looking to harness some of their hydro resources to have hydropower. They brought in electric buses. A few weeks ago, the governor was in China to inspect trains. It's understandable that we all collectively are going to develop and make this nation great. So, like I said, there are opportunities in the power sector. Power is a necessity for everyone, no matter the industry or sector you're in. And as we derive more accountability from our elected leaders, this is going to be one of them. Imagine a governor or local government chairman being able to say in my jurisdiction we have 18 hours of steady power. That person would be loved. And also if people see the impact of the power sector, I believe we'll get more.

The power minister recently put the indebtedness to electricity generation firms at N1.3tn. How is this impacting the Gencos?

Liquidity challenges. So for some GenCos, they've had challenges with meeting their acquisition debts, their obligation; you need money to make money, you need money to fund the maintenance of your turbines, fund your operations, train your staff. Of course, pay your gas suppliers because it is not a charity, it is a business. So, when there are liquidity challenges, it does affect your operation. But prudent management of your businesses can help. You asked me earlier about dividends. We have a good dividend policy that is still conservative, where our retained earnings are strong. And we're able to fund our operations. It might delight you to know that we cleaned up our USD obligation. So we don't have any USD loan. Now, on our books, why it is important is because some companies had issues last year with FX exposure, we are clean on our acquisition loan for Transcorp power. So are there liquidity issues? Yes. But is it to the extent of 'oh, we can't move? We are big, and this is where the power of a conglomerate also comes in.

There's this rumour in the past that mega dealers of generators are partly sabotaging the power sector. How true is this?

I haven't seen any data that would support that. And if you just look, you know once upon a time, the story was that it is diesel people, it's cheaper for you to buy power from one source than the other. Our power infrastructure is quite good. And there's room for a lot of investment in technology and infrastructure that creates more transparency in the system. The more we're able to push more people to prepaid meters and of course, make sure they are unable to bypass those prepaid meters, the better. Look at our mobile telecommunication sector, if credit finishes on your phone, it is gone.

Nigerians complain about crazy billing in the power sector and it appears the Discos are not keen on issuing prepaid metres to customers. Why is that?

It will delight you to know that the regulators are also clamping down on it, there are regulatory orders on crazy billing. You have a maximum you can't go above. So, what I would just say is that the Nigerian power sector is experiencing a total turnaround. And I'm quite confident that we'll get it but I also want to invite the end-user; those that are stealing our power are not helping us; they're sabotaging the economy. Then the people that vandalize. You just go somewhere, steal cables and a number of these things are not made in Nigeria. When it comes to this power sector, it belongs to all of us. Right now, AEDC is working on a platform that would allow us to get insights from customers and use it on the go to fix issues.

HEIRS ENERGIES:

We've set new standard for excellence and innovation in energy sector – Igiehon

H EIRS ENERGIES' CEO, OSA IGIEHON, in this engaging interview, opens up on how much the Africa's largest indigenous-owned integrated energy company is committed to meeting Africa's unique energy needs. He speaks more on the coy's focus on innovation, sustainable growth, and how Nigeria can meet its

Please share with us the success story that is today Heirs Energy

Heirs Energies Limited, formerly known as Heirs Holdings Oil & Gas Limited, is Africa's largest indigenous-owned integrated energy company, committed to meeting Africa's unique energy needs while aligning with global sustainability goals and objectives. With a strong focus on innovation, sustainable growth, brownfield excellence, and community development, Heirs Energies leads the way in the evolving energy landscape, contributing to a more prosperous Nigeria and indeed Africa.

Our journey commenced in January 2021 with the successful acquisition of SPDC JV's interest in OML17 through a \$1.1 billion transaction. This strategic move not only solidified our joint venture partnership with the NNPC but also marked the start of a new chapter dedicated to uniquely addressing Nigeria's and Africa's energy needs.

Under the visionary leadership of our Chairman, Tony O. Elumelu, CFR, Heirs Energies has set a new standard for excellence and innovation in the energy sector. From a significant increase in oil and gas production to pioneering a novel model of community engagement, our efforts are geared towards creating a lasting positive impact. Our operational success is underpinned by a world-class Nigerian management team that is delivering innovative solutions addressing brownfield challenges that had been historically daunting to the sector.

Heirs Energies is unwavering in its commitment to empowering communities, enhancing local capacity, and fostering economic growth through responsible energy production and supply. Our dedication to safety, environmental sustainability, and community engagement continue to distinguish us as a role model institution within the global energy sector.

How has Heirs Energy impacted the energy sector positively?

Heirs Energies has positively impacted the Nigerian energy sector by significantly increasing oil and gas production, pioneering a new model of community engagement, and maintaining an exemplary safety record - all pivotal to securing Nigeria's sustainable energy future.

Among our notable achievements, we successfully grew our oil production from 27,000 to 40,000 barrels a day in 2023 through the restart of our growth program. This growth has not only expanded our output but also positioned us as pioneers in brownfield engineering and innovative techniques. We are eager to share these advancements with the industry for the benefit of Nigeria as we all join hands to pull our country up from the current economic challenges.

In addition to oil production growth, Heirs Energies has also played a crucial role in maintaining consistent gas supply for domestic consumption. Achieving a peak gas production of 86 million standard cubic feet per day in 2023, we have dedicated all our gas supply to the domestic market,

enabling power generation, fueling various industrial uses, powering thousands of businesses and lighting up thousands of homes across the country.

Our unwavering commitment to safety is reflected in our stellar track record. Operating LTI-free in OML 17, we have reached an impressive milestone of 1,081 days and 5,212,632 manhours without a lost time incident as of December 31, 2023. This underscores our dedication to safety best practices, ensuring zero incidents and fatalities since inception.

Beyond operational excellence, Heirs Energies has made a profound impact in the communities where we operate. Through skill development initiatives, electrification projects, and support for educational aspirations, we have empowered hundreds of individuals and facilitated the dreams of over 280 students within our host communities.

Our commitment to good governance is exemplified by the establishment of the OML 17 Host Community Development Trust, a testament to our innovative approach that has garnered recognition from the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission.

Heirs Energies continues to be a driving force in propelling Nigeria's energy sector forward, embracing a holistic approach that combines operational success, brownfield excellence, safety, community development, and effective governance.

Are your operations majorly onshore or offshore?

Heirs Energies' operations are currently onshore, notably underscored by our acquisition of the OML17 and ongoing development of the asset. This strategic focus affords us the opportunity to actively engage with local communities, manage environmental impacts, and leverage the logistical benefits inherent in onshore operations to fulfil Nigeria's energy requirements more efficiently. Our onshore activities enable us to directly contribute

to the economic and social development of the areas we operate in, aligning seamlessly with our commitment to creating sustainable value and fostering shared prosperity.

Are we expecting new investment prospects from your company?

Heirs Energies is unwavering in its commitment to enhance value for its stakeholders through strategic and well-considered investments.

We plan to sustainably grow our oil and gas production and increase our resource base through both organic and inorganic growth. Furthermore, we aim to selectively broaden our value chain beyond upstream operations. Strengthening ties with local industries, particularly for power generation and processing/value addition, is on our agenda. Additionally, exploring other energy sources, particularly renewables, is a focus going forward.

Our pursuit of value accretion is intricately linked to a forward-looking investment strategy, ensuring that Heirs Energies remains agile, competitive, and well-positioned within the dynamic landscape of the oil and gas industry.

Nigeria has been finding it tough to meet its crude oil production quota as approved by OPEC. In your estimation, what steps would help in bridging this deficit?

To meet its OPEC quota, Nigeria can undertake several strategic steps to boost oil production. Below are key initiatives for consideration:

- Increase focus on growing production:
- Focus should be on growing production and less focus on reserves growth. Investments in upstream activities, including drilling and well development, to discover and tap into oil reserves should be prioritised. Further, the country should push to accelerate



• Igiehon

oil production ahead of the global energy transition curve.

- Adopt Brownfield approach to mature fields development:
- Given the access of capital challenge for oil and gas development, low-cost brownfield technologies, approaches, and capabilities are necessary to optimise the production efficiency of existing fields and maximise recovery rates.
- Security Measures/Crude Theft:
- Sustain the current security framework for safeguarding oil and gas infrastructure, with a continued focus on evacuation pipeline systems across the country to enable increased terminal receipts and exports. Continue to tackle security challenges within oil-producing regions, addressing issues such as theft, vandalism, and conflicts, to minimise disruption to production.
- Fiscal Incentives and Policies:
- Provide fiscal incentives and favourable policies to further attract investment in the Nigerian upstream activities.
- Community Engagement:
- Engage with local communities to ensure their support for oil production activities, addressing any social or environmental concerns.
- Technology Adoption:
- Embrace advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digital solutions, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of oil production operations.

By strategically implementing these steps, Nigeria can work towards meeting its OPEC quota, while also fostering sustainable and responsible practices in the oil and gas industry

From your assessment, is the government doing enough to tackle the challenges bringing about low oil output?

Given the recent developments and the journey embarked upon by Heirs Energies, particularly throughout 2022 and 2023, our assessment of the government's initiatives to address the challenges causing abysmally low oil output is notably positive. The events in 2022 and 2023 highlighted the urgent need for decisive action against the pervasive issues of crude theft and pipeline sabotage, which significantly hampered the industry's productivity and the country's economy.

Our proactive measures to spotlight and tackle these issues led to a pivotal moment where the government took concrete actions that have substantially curbed these illegal activities. This intervention played a crucial role in mitigating the factors that contributed to low oil output, demonstrating a commitment to resolving the problem.

The outcomes are evident: from a dire situation in December 2021 when only 3 per cent of our crude production reached its intended destination, we have witnessed a remarkable turnaround with over 80 per cent of our crude now successfully getting to the terminal.

However, this progress does not diminish the need for continuous effort and vigilance. The challenge of securing the oil sector against theft and sabotage is ongoing, and while the recent government measures have been effective, the battle is far from over. It necessitates sustained, collaborative efforts between the government, industry stakeholders, and the communities to ensure that these gains are not only maintained but also built upon.

Therefore, while acknowledging the significant strides made, we also recognise the importance of maintaining momentum in these efforts. The government's actions have set a positive trajectory, but the journey towards eliminating the threats to our oil output continues.

Energy transition is being pushed globally. How is Heirs transitioning with regards to this, and how well is your company supporting the country in this regard?

We are charting our way forward in the new energies space by actively strategising our roadmap with a focus on embracing and integrating new energies. This involves a comprehensive plan to explore, adopt, and leverage emerging and alternative energy sources, over the medium and



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IN THE SHORT TERM, GAS WILL DRIVE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BASELOAD ENERGY CAPACITY, PROVIDING STABLE POWER FOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH WHILE NIGERIA DEVELOPS ITS RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

long term to enhance our sustainability, reduce environmental impact, and stay abreast of the evolving energy landscape.

Our commitment involves a continuous understanding of technological advancements, assessing viable options, and aligning our operations with the principles of cleaner and more sustainable energy practices. By charting this course, we aim to not only meet current energy demands but also contribute positively to the global shift towards more environmentally friendly and efficient energy solutions.

Heirs Energies is part of a larger group; Heirs Holdings, with Mr. Tony Elumelu, as Chairman, whose concept of Africapitalism essentially talks about a double bottom line of 'doing good commercially' and 'doing well socially'. In this concept, the Tony Elumelu Foundation is enabling our youths in a big way in the space of entrepreneurship through its flagship program, the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme.

The program has produced alumni who have

matured projects in the new energies space, including the development of solar powered bionic arms for amputees in Africa.

Are you in alignment with the government on the adoption of natural gas as Nigeria's transition fuel?

We are very much in alignment with the government's position on the adoption of natural gas as Nigeria's transition fuel.

Although the Nigerian government's ambition for energy transition and carbon neutrality by 2060 might seem at odds with a gas utilisation and development agenda, it is crucial to recognise the distinct role gas can play. Despite being unfairly grouped with traditional fossil fuels, gas has a significantly lower emissions profile. Coal and petroleum products, including gasoline and diesel, produce 2.2 to 3 times and 1.5 to 2 times more CO₂ per unit of energy, respectively, compared to natural gas.

As a nation rich in gas resources, we must leverage this abundant resource to address our energy deficits and become energy sufficient. Gas is poised to play a significant role in establishing baseload energy capacity, stabilisation of the grid for seamless renewable integration, and addressing clean cooking deficits through the use of LPG. In the short term, gas will drive the establishment of baseload energy capacity, providing stable power for industrial growth while Nigeria develops its renewable energy infrastructure.

Market realities also indicate a more sustained role for gas in Nigeria's energy landscape given the substantial financing required to build renewable energy infrastructure, increasing local consumption and growing demand for gas exports.

To align with the urgency of energy transition, the gas sector has seen investments in research and technology focusing on carbon capture, utilisation, and storage. This ensures minimal carbon emissions during the gas production process produces aligning with the goal of a net zero future.

Does Nigeria really have the capacity (whether financially or technically) to transit based on the global push for energy transition?

On August 24, 2022, Nigeria launched its Energy Transition Plan - a comprehensive framework outlining the strategy to achieve the dual objectives of net zero carbon emissions by 2060 and the eradication of energy poverty in the country by 2030. The plan requires a substantial investment of \$1.9 trillion to reach net zero by 2060, with an additional \$410 billion above projected usual spending translating to approximately \$10 billion spend annually.

Africa faces a substantial energy deficit. While Nigeria has taken steps to lead in energy transition discussions within Sub-Saharan Africa, there needs to be a paradigm shift towards a Nigerian energy sufficiency and transition plan. Emphasising sufficiency as an African imperative, this multipronged approach should incorporate both traditional and new energy sources to meet the energy needs of 100% of the population.

The proposed strategy of energy sufficiency and transitioning suggests allocating resources towards achieving sufficiency as a foundational step, thereby positioning Nigeria to attract the necessary resources for a successful transition.

Please walk us through some of your outreaches in terms of CSR to host communities around your areas of operation.

Our CSR initiatives are intricately woven into our operations' philosophy, embodying a shared destiny with our host communities and a commitment to making a positive impact in our areas of operations. Through various initiatives, we have empowered more than 300 young people through skill acquisition programs, upgraded electrical infrastructure benefiting over 270,000 people, and undertaken numerous initiatives in the areas of health, education, and the environment.

We have placed a strong emphasis on supporting the local economy by ensuring that 100 per cent of the gas we produce is utilised for domestic purposes, including powering homes through power generating companies like Trans Afam, FIPL and supporting other industrial activities. Additionally, we are the gas supplier to the new 181-megawatt Geometric Power plant located in Aba, Abia State.

These efforts reflect our commitment to fostering sustainable development and creating enduring value for the communities where we operate. Our goal is to ensure that our presence serves as a catalyst for positive transformation, reflecting our commitment to being a responsible corporate organisation.



• Makoko floating school before it collapse. Photo: Sodiq Adhlakun

PUNCH

The Most Widely Read Newspaper

RATES & RATINGS

THE PUBLISHING COMPANY

The Punch Newspaper

THE NEWSPAPER

The Punch

WEBSITE

www.punchng.com

THE MANDATE

To provide informed journalism in support of Nigeria's advancement

THE VISION

To become Africa's No. 1 online newspaper -in influence, content and traffic

EDITORIAL FOCUS

Politics and business- and a lot of entertainment, lifestyle and sport

TARGET READERSHIP

Leaders in politics and business - and youths in their millions

EDITORIAL VALUES

Independence Impartiality, Integrity, Defence of Public Interest Respect for Diversity.



PUNCH is Nigeria's foremost newspaper group with large footprints in both traditional and non-traditional media landscapes. Our deep knowledge of Nigeria's digital ecosystem, diverse audience, in-depth knowledge of programmatic advertising, data-driven solutions/campaigns and international partnerships put us ahead of our competitors. Take advantage of these to create and run campaigns that drive results, whether it is brand awareness, growing market share, promotions or sales. We are ranked as no 1 Newspaper digital platform base on Similarweb with over 60 million pageviews per month.

PUNCH

The most widely read Newspaper

ADVERT RATES

SERIES DISCOUNT

5 - 10 Insertions - 2.5% Extra
11 - 15 Insertions - 5% Extra
16 - 20 Insertions - 7.5% Extra
21 Insertions & Above - 10%

PREMIUM PAGES

Special position attracts surcharge as follows:
Pages 2 & 3 - 100% surcharge
Pages 6, 7 & 8 - 75% surcharge
Page 9 - 50% surcharge.
For Saturday and Sunday Punch, pages 5 and 7 attract 50% surcharge.
Pages 2 and 3 attract 75% surcharge.

COPY DATE

2 Days within Lagos.
7 Days outside Lagos.

ADVERT FORMAT

Corel draw (Curved), PDF, JPEG (with minimum resolution of 300 dpi). All colour adverts must be in CMYK with colour guide attached.

ALL RATES ARE SUBJECT TO **7.5% VAT** WITH EFFECT FROM MARCH 1, 2022.

COLOUR

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	F/PAGE	702,000
2	H/PAGE	400,200
3	Q/PAGE	215,600
4	14" X 5	681,000
5	14" X 4	544,800
6	14" X 2	272,400
7	FPS 6"X3	2591,400
8	FPS 6"X2	1,535,700
9	BPS 6"X3	1,118,900
10	BPS 6"X2	745,900
11	ROP 3"X 6	276,600
12	ROP 2"X 6	261,300
13	ROP 4"X 6	316,100
14	ROP 5"X 6	347,700
15	ROP 6"X 6	382,500
16	FPS 2" X 6	1,535,700
17	FPS 3" X 6	2,591,400
18	BPS 2" X 6	745,900
19	13" X 5	632,400
20	13" X 2	217,300
21	11" X 5	611,500
22	11" X 4	489,200
23	11" X 2	183,900
24	10" X 6	666,900
25	10" X 5	555,900
26	10" X 4	444,700
27	10" X 3	333,600
28	10" X 2	173,900
29	9" X 6	600,300
30	9" X 5	500,300
31	9" X 4	400,300
32	9" X 3	277,100
33	8" X 6	533,700
34	8" X 5	444,700
35	8" X 4	355,800
36	8" X 3	246,400
37	8" X 2	164,300
38	7" X 5	389,200
39	7" X 4	272,400
40	7" X 2	117,000
41	6" X 4	246,400
42	6" X 3	150,500
43	6" X 2	100,300
44	5" X 5	209,000
45	5" X 4	173,900
46	5" X 3	125,400
47	5" X 2	83,600
48	4" X 2	66,900
49	3" X 3	75,300
50	3" X 2	50,200
51	2" X 2	33,500
52	1" X 2	16,800
53	1" X 1	8,400
54	BPS 2" X 2	460,700
55	EARPIECE 2" X 2	845,000
56	CENTRE SPREAD	1,974,400
57	DOUBLE SPREAD	1,755,000
58	DOUBLE SPREAD (1/2)	877,500

BLACK & WHITE

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	F/PAGE	530,900
2	H/PAGE	302,700
3	Q/PAGE	163,000
4	14" X 5	515,000
5	14" X 4	412,000
6	14" X 2	208,400
7	13" X 5	478,200
8	13" X 2	164,400
9	11" X 5	462,400
10	11" X 4	370,000
11	11" X 2	139,100
12	10" X 6	504,400
13	10" X 5	420,400
14	10" X 4	336,400
15	10" X 3	252,300
16	10" X 2	126,500
17	9" X 6	454,000
18	9" X 5	378,400
19	9" X 4	302,700
20	9" X 3	204,900
21	8" X 6	403,600
22	8" X 5	336,400
23	8" X 4	269,100
24	8" X 3	186,300
25	8" X 2	101,200
26	7" X 5	294,300
27	7" X 4	208,400
28	7" X 2	88,500
29	6" X 4	186,300
30	6" X 3	113,800
31	6" X 2	75,900
32	5" X 5	158,000
33	5" X 4	126,500
34	5" X 3	94,900
35	5" X 2	63,300
36	4" X 2	50,600
37	3" X 6	151,400
38	3" X 3	56,900
39	3" X 2	38,000
40	2" X 6	82,600
41	2" X 2	25,300
42	1" X 2	12,700
43	1" X 1	6,400
44	CENTRE SPREAD	1,492,900
45	DOUBLE SPREAD	1,327,300
46	DOUBLE SPREAD (1/2)	663,700



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POLITICAL (COLOUR)

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	F/PAGE	836,000
2	H/PAGE	520,200
3	Q/PAGE	280,200
4	CENTRE SPREAD	2,369,300
5	DOUBLE SPREAD	2,106,000
6	HALF DOUBLE SPREAD	1,053,000
7	10" X 6	867,000
8	10" X 5	722,700
9	10" X 4	578,100
10	FRONT PAGE EARPIECE(2X2)	1,014,000
11	BACK PAGE EARPIECE (2X2)	598,900
12	BPS (6" X 2)	969,700
13	BPS (6" X 3/3" X 6)	1,454,500

POLITICAL (BLACK & WHITE)

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	F/PAGE	690,200
2	H/PAGE	393,400
3	Q/PAGE	211,900
4	CENTRE SPREAD	1,791,500
5	DOUBLE SPREAD	1,592,700
6	HALF DOUBLE SPREAD	796,400
7	10" X 6	655,700
8	10" X 5	546,500

SPECIAL POSITIONS

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	FULL WRAP	33,000,000
2	10" X 6 (FP)	19,041,000
3	10" X 6 (BP)	9,520,500
4	HALF FRONT PAGE	12,186,300
5	5" X 6 (FP)	9,520,500
6	4" X 6 (FP)	6,093,200
7	2" X 6 (UNDER MASTHEAD)	5,175,000
8	2" X 2 (ROP EARPIECE)	133,800
9	FRONT PAGE PHOTO (PAS)	4,800,000
10	BACK PAGE PHOTO (PAS)	3,000,000
11	FRONT PAGE PHOTO FRAME- (PAS)	11, 630,000

RATE FOR COMPUTER & IT/PROPERTY/HOME & DÉCOR. (Black & White Only)

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	Q/PAGE	95,400
2	10" X 2	95,200
3	8" X 2	76,100
4	7" X 2	66,600
5	6" X 2	57,100
6	5" X 2	47,600
7	4" X 2	38,100
8	3" X 2	28,600
9	2" X 6 (BOTTOM STRIP)	69,600
10	2" X 2	19,100
11	1" X 2	9,600
12	1" X 1	4,800

CONTACT INFORMATION

E-MAIL:
 punchadvert@yahoo.com
 adverts@punchng.com,
 advertpunch@gmail.com
 For more information,

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
THE ADVERT DEPARTMENT on
 Tel: 09053090032 (LAGOS),
 08037267963 (OUTSTATION)
 08032070753 (ABUJA)

VACANCY, TRAINING, WORKSHOP, SEMINAR & EMPLOYMENT CONSULTING FIRMS.

(Note: Black & White Adverts on WEDNESDAYS Only)

S/N	SIZE	RATE
1	DOUBLE SPREAD (1/2)	927,800
2	FULL PAGE	471,900
3	14" X 5	471,800
4	HALF PAGE	274,400
5	14" X 4	404,400
6	14" X 2	168,500
7	11" X 6	460,300
8	11" X 5	399,500
9	10" X 6	435,800
10	10" X 5	363,200
11	10" X 4	232,800
12	10" X 3	174,600
13	9" X 6	376,600
14	9" X 5	314,200
15	9" X 4	209,500
16	9" X 3	157,300
17	8" X 6	279,000
18	8" X 5	232,800
19	7" X 5	203,500
20	8" X 4	186,200
21	8" X 3	139,700
22	7" X 4	162,700
23	Q/PAGE	95,400
24	10" X 2	95,200
25	9" X 2	85,600
26	8" X 2	76,100
27	7" X 2	66,600
28	6" X 2	57,100
29	5" X 2	47,600
30	4" X 2	38,100
31	3" X 2	28,600
32	2" X 6 (B/STRIPS)	69,600
33	2" X 2	19,100
34	1" X 2	9,600
35	1" X 1	4,800

CLASSIFIED ADVERT

SIZE	FLAT RATE
CLASSIFIED ADVERT	4,000
PRESS RELEASE	60,000

PICTURE & CAPTION

SIZE	RATE
3" X 3 COLOUR (WEEKEND ONLY)	60,800
4" X 4 COLOUR	81,600
F/PAGE COL Photosplash (Sunday Only)	384,000
H/PAGE COL Photosplash (Sunday Only)	192,000

Please Also Note That Full Wrap Around Takes Precedence Over The Publication Of FPS, BPS, Page 2 & Inside Back Cover Advert.

Also 4" X 6 (Front Page) And Above Take Precedence Over The Publication Of 2" X 6 FPS & 3" X 6 FPS Advert

Account Name: Punch Nig. Ltd
 Account No.: 2002826840
 Bank: First Bank Of Nig, Ltd

Account Name: Punch Nig. Ltd
 Account No.: 0005494896
 Bank: Guaranty Trust Bank

Account Name: Punch Nig. Ltd
 Account No.: 1017274525
 Bank: Uba Plc

Account Name: Punch Nig. Ltd
 Account No.: 1013604469
 Account No (Abuja): 1016877394
 Bank: Zenith Bank Plc

Why You Should Advertise On PUNCH PLATFORMS

Extensive Reach: With millions of monthly visitors, Punch Online Platforms offer unparalleled exposure to a diverse audience across Nigeria and beyond.

Trusted Source: Established in 1971, Punch has built a reputation as a reliable and respected news source, ensuring that your brand is associated with credibility and trustworthiness.

Targeted Advertising: Our advanced targeting capabilities allow you to reach specific demographics, interests, and locations, ensuring that your message resonates with the right audience for maximum impact.

Multi-Platform Presence: Advertise across a variety of platforms including the Punch website, mobile app, and social media channels, ensuring that your brand reaches users wherever they consume news and information.

Engagement Opportunities: Take advantage of interactive ad formats such as rich media, video ads, and sponsored content to engage with our audience in meaningful ways and drive action.

Data-Driven Insights: Gain valuable insights into your campaign performance with our robust analytics tools, allowing you to optimize your advertising strategy for better results.

Brand Visibility: Stand out from the competition and increase brand awareness with prominent placement opportunities on Punch Online Platforms, ensuring that your message gets noticed.

Flexible Advertising Options: Choose from a variety of advertising formats including banner ads, native advertising, sponsored articles, and more, allowing you to tailor your campaign to meet your specific goals and budget.

Proven Results: Countless brands have successfully leveraged Punch Online Platforms to achieve their marketing objectives, demonstrating the effectiveness of advertising with us.

Supportive Customer Service: Our dedicated team of advertising experts is here to support you every step of the way, providing personalized assistance to ensure that your campaign is a success.

Community Engagement: Become part of the Punch community and engage with our loyal readership through advertising, demonstrating your commitment to Nigeria's vibrant media landscape.

Innovative Solutions: Stay ahead of the curve with access to cutting-edge advertising technologies and innovative solutions that help you stay competitive in today's digital marketplace.

Social Impact: By advertising with Punch, you're not just promoting your brand, you're also supporting independent journalism and contributing to the free flow of information in Nigeria.

Brand Association: Align your brand with Punch's values of integrity, independence, and excellence, enhancing your reputation and building trust with our audience.

Continuous Improvement: Punch is committed to continuously improving our online platforms to deliver the best possible experience for our readers and advertisers alike, ensuring that your advertising investment delivers maximum value over time.

With Punch Online Platforms, you have the opportunity to reach a vast audience, build brand awareness, drive engagement, and achieve your marketing goals in Nigeria's dynamic digital landscape.

OUR OFFERINGS

OUR PLATFORMS METRICS

Branded Content:
Also known as Sponsored Articles, are a form of native ads that are promoted.

Banners Sizes:
Leader Board (728 x 90)
Sky Scraper (300 x 600)
Mobile banner (300 x 600, 300 x 250, 300 x 200, 300 x 100, 300 x 50)



WEB

PUNCHNG.COM
60M
Page views

SOCIAL MEDIA

PUNCH NEWSPAPERS
X Followers
6.6M

PUNCH NEWSPAPERS
Facebook Total Followers
4.4M

PUNCH NEWSPAPERS
Instagram Total Followers
1.2M

OUR OFFERINGS

OUR RATES

- Branded Content
- Banner Ads
- Text Links
- Social media post
- Video
- LinkBack
- Bulk buying
- Corporate Branding
- Live Streaming
- Classified Ads
- Page Takeover



Standard banner sizes on Desktop Platform

CPM(1000 Impressions)					
BANNER SIZE	728x90px	468x60px	300x250px	300x200px	300x600px
PRICE IN NAIRA	600	500	500	400	800
MAXIMUM RESOLUTION	100kb	100kb	100kb	100kb	200kb

Standard banner sizes on Mobile Platform

CPM(1000 Impressions)				
BANNER SIZE	320x50px	320x100px	300x250px	300x600px
PRICE IN NAIRA	400	500	600	900
MAXIMUM RESOLUTION	100kb	100kb	100kb	100kb

Standard banner sizes on Mobile Application

CPM(1000 Impressions)		
BANNER SIZE	320x50px	320x250px
PRICE IN NAIRA	300	400
MAXIMUM RESOLUTION	100kb	100kb

Minimum number of Impressions 500,000

OUR RATES

OTHER NON-STANDARD RATES

Sponsored Post/day	N250,000
Facebook Post with banner & link	N80,000
Twitter Post with banner & link	N80,000
Instagram Picture Post	N100,000
Text link ad/week	N150,000
Advertorial Creation	N500,000.00
Page Branding: this will include company logo, articles, addresses, related banners, URLs. Duration is three days	N1,800,000.00

***All rates are subject to 7.5% VAT**

Banner Specification

--All banners are provided in JPEG,PNG,SWF,GIF,HTML or TAGS format..
-We will expect that all banners for publication are provided three days before campaign.

-The least impression an advertiser can buy is 500,000

VIDEOS

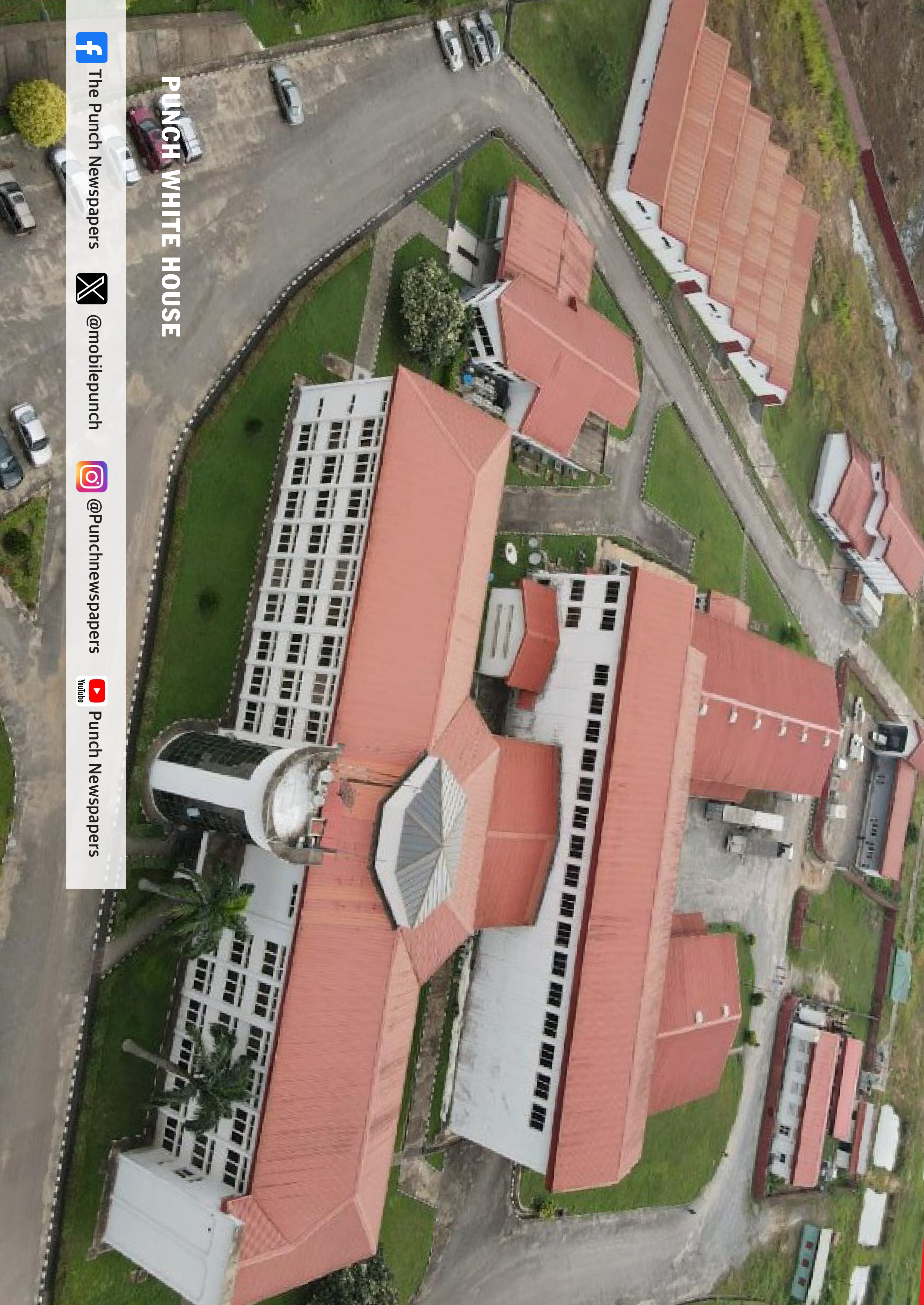
Facebook Video Post	N100,000
Twitter Video Post	N100,000
Instagram Video Post	N150,000
Website Video ads (minimum of 10,000 views) at #20 per view	N200,000

***All rates are subject to 7.5% VAT**

Banner Specification

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-We will expect that all banners for publication are provided three days before campaign.

-The least impression an advertiser can buy is 500,000



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Punch Newspapers

PUNCH SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION

Pedigree, Prestige, Promise

1973 - 2023