Taking Youths Off the Streets

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Within one year in office, Rauf Aregbesola has given jobs to 20,000 jobless youths in Osun State

For Rauf Aregbesola, governor of Osun State, it has been celebration galore since he clocked one year in office on November 27, last year. As part of the celebration, he organised a four-day retreat for members of his cabinet and top civil servants at Offa, Kwara State, to assess the administration’s performance and chart the way forward. Top government officials have given the administration a pass mark. Olufemi Ifaturoti, director-general, Bureau of Social Services, BOSS, which monitors the performance of all ministries, departments and agencies, MDAs, said Aregbesola has adhered to the six-point agenda encapsulated in the Green Book he presented to the people when he kick-started his campaigns in 2006. It was a policy document detailing the government’s thrust. In it, he outlined his programmes to include banishing poverty by reviving commercial activities focused on wealth creation; tackling hunger through massive increase in food production, banishing unemployment, restoring healthy living, promoting functional education and enhancing communal peace and progress. Ifaturoti, a member of the committee that prepared the book, was saddled with fashioning out how to create 20,000 jobs within the first 100 days of the new government. “We came out with Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme, OYES, and absorbed 20,000 jobless graduates within 93 days,” he said. The boss of the agency which monitors every project, contracts and programmes to ensure probity and compliance with key performance indicators, KPI, said that when government advertised for volunteers into the scheme, over 200,000 graduates applied contrary to expectations. Ten percent, that is 20,000 of them were selected and camped at the National Youth Service Corps, NYSC, orientation camp, Ede, and other sites in the state for three weeks. After the training programmes, they were deployed to areas like traffic management, environmental sanitation and others. Every month, the state government spends N200 million on the OYES men and women at N10,000 each. “This has impacted greatly on the economy of the state,” he said. Indeed, the multiplier effect of the state’s first direct approach to solving mass youth unemployment is unquantifiable. For instance, from his N10,000 monthly stipend, Lawrence Adeyemi, an economics graduate of the University of Uyo, has started a fish pond in which he has about 1000 fish. Kayode Ojeyinka from Moro and leader of OYES volunteers in Ife North LGA, told Newswatch that many of his colleagues have joined co-operative and credit thrift societies to save money in order to take loans and start business and ultimately become self-employed. Recently, officials of the World Bank visited Osun and gave the government a thumb up for the efforts at reducing youth unemployment. Ifaturoti said three states are understudying the scheme with a view to adopting it for their teeming jobless youths. The Osun State government has since followed OYES up with Osun Rural Enterprises and Agricultural Programme, OREAP. Simultaneously, the governor launched the ‘Quick Impact Intervention Programme,’ an agricultural credit of N153.265 million for peasant co-operative farmers. The two programmes are expected to boost agricultural production. As exit strategies for the OYES volunteers, government has set up O’ Tech to enable volunteers to acquire information technology, ICT, competencies they lack and then move on. There is also a Life Academy where young graduates are taught skills to make them self employed. More importantly, however, Ifaturoti said the government is absorbing about 5,000 qualified OYES men into the state’s Teaching Service Commission to improve education. To turn Osogbo into a commercial hub as envisaged in the Green Book, Ifaturoti said government was building a road through Gbogan, Orile Owu and Ijebu Igbo to Lagos and bypass the chaotic traffic in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital. It has also built a platform at the train station in Osogbo even as the Nigerian Railway Corporation has embarked on massive rehabilitation of its tracks from Lagos to Kano. Already, manufacturers have begun to use the facility. Lafarge Cement WAPCO has paid the NRC to move 600 tons of cement from its new factory at Lakatabu to Osun daily. The BOSS helmsman noted that the governor was committed to probity and transparency. “He is providing my agency with the tools to keep a tab on whatever government is doing at any point in time, assess performance of projects and their impacts on people, make things work faster but not circumvent the civil servants who are the engine rooms of the administration,” he said, adding “to keep BOSS focused, the governor monitors us.”