

Vop Osili*Architect, Founding Partner and Principal, A2SO4**Asa Dam*

I gazed across the Nigerian landscape, allowing the scenic beauty of the area to wash over me. The year was 2007, and I had traveled to the Asa River Dam in Nigeria to survey the site for possible development. The lushness of the terrain coupled with the serenity of the water created such a peaceful view that I felt inspired. Over the horizon a single fisherman was casting a net over the side of his boat. Not a single postcard could have been more stunning. There were big plans for this area: plans that had the potential to put Nigeria on the global map.

The Asa Dam project is a massive undertaking that will result in a tourist center unlike anything that has ever existed in that part of the world. It includes a large amusement park, three hotels, a conference center, a mall, gardens, and a sprawling golf course. Also included in the plans is an international school, which will give Nigerian children the chance to experience high-quality education for the first time. The project will cover almost 1,000 acres and seeks to elevate the Asa Dam area's prominence, both nationally and internationally. It is also an environmentally-conscious project that will preserve the ecosystem and biodiversity of the area. The goal is to bring new investment to Nigeria and new pride to a nation of people.

In many parts of the world, projects like Asa Dam are not unique. But in Nigeria, an oil-rich country that has only just embarked on a new era of economic and political reform, initiatives that can expand economic opportunity are sadly too few. The Asa River Dam was constructed in the 1970s and was used almost

exclusively as a source of water for the local population. The area has been neglected for more than two decades, but recently, a newly-elected democratic governor in one of Nigeria's 36 states saw the power of the Asa River Dam project to reverse decades of stagnation and transform the region.

In my work as an architect, I have had the opportunity to share our Indiana values and work ethic with the rest of the world. Our Indianapolis-based firm has worked with clients in many parts of the world to create and design new projects. This work has meant learning about diverse landscapes, traditions, and people, and we have also gained important insights. Our design process has been enriched by exposure to the power of visionary leadership, and our creative process has evolved as we strive for excellence in our work and to develop projects that will improve lives here in Indiana, and in the rest of the world.

The Asa Dam Development is truly an inspiring place. This project represents hope for change and progress even for the world's poorest communities. The project also has the potential to serve as an engine for economic expansion for other areas of Nigeria. Beyond the natural beauty of the Asa Dam project, the vision that led to its development is enduring. For too long, government officials in many developing countries have impeded economic growth instead of aiding it. Asa Dam is a breathtaking reminder of the power of bold vision and leadership to create opportunity and transform lives.