

**Isikan: Ondo's 5-star market in Akure. Facilities: •24hrs solar light •Creche •Clinic •Toilets  
•Police post •Bank •Boreholes •Mosque**

by Wale Ojo Lanre, Tribune

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Adeyemi Adenikinju, standing akimbo at the front of this school, could not believe his eyes.

He put his hand inside his trouser pocket, sought out a handkerchief to wipe off the imaginary particles that covered his eyes to enable him see clearly what he perceived as the eighth wonders of the world. Adenikinju, a seafarer who left Akure for Alexandria, Egypt, for a course in Maritime Engineering in 2009 and who came back two weeks ago, was going to buy his favourite snail from his customer at Isikan Market.

With nobody engaging him in any discussion, he soliloquised:

“No, this cannot be! I can't believe this! This can't be real. Can this be Isikan market? No, no, no!”

To be doubly sure, he crossed the median to the other side of the road and entered the beautifully enclosed compound, only to be confronted by rows of open stalls where foodstuff sold by gaily dressed women and men were.

“This can't be true,” he muttered.

However, he summoned courage and asked one of the traders “Excuse me ma, is this Isikan market?”

Sensing that Adenikinju was surprised at the state of the market, the trader responded “My brother, Governor Mimiko has turned Isikan into a five-star market.”

“Then, if this is truly the old Isikan Market, I concur with you that it is a five-star market. However, where is Iya Onigbin's stall?” Adenikinju asked.

Convinced now that he was at the right place, Adenikinju, before leaving the woman, commented. “This transformation is phenomenal!”

Only those who never knew the Isikan market of old will not be dazed with what Governor Mimiko has done.”

A member of the Tribune Tourism Magazine crew whose mother once operated a café in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, a few years ago and who, when circumstances arose, usually helped the mother to pick some items at Isikan market, was also speechless at the site of the old Isikan.

“This is marvelously surprising. I cannot believe this. This is not the Isikan that I knew. The one I used to know was ugly, disorganised, dirty, stinking and smelling, with ugly sheds of different shapes and sizes. I don't know this five-star market.”

Mrs Adedipe Oluwafunke, a 58-year-old seller of tomatoes, described Isikan thus: “this is a completely brand new Isikan. The former one was an eyesore. Terribly disorganised, dirty, with lawlessness being the order of the day. No decorum, either from the traders or the buyers, no decency. It was nauseatingly rowdy and the sellers then, like the then environment were dirty, snobbish and rude. It was like a pigsty.”

“And when Governor Mimiko was campaigning for votes in Akure and promised the sea of heads who thronged the stadium that he would restore dignity and bring sanity to bear at the markets in Ondo State, of course, because of his unassailable credibility and precedence, we never doubted him. But we never envisioned that what he had for the markets could be beyond our imagination.”

According to Uche Adichie, a spare part dealer, who claimed to have secured a lock-up shop in Isikan market, “When Iroko was making the promise of changing the face of the market in Ondo State, though we believed him because he is a man of his words, I swear, the man surprised us with the dimension of this beautiful sight. We had thought he would just come, build some sheds, tax the people heavily, and start to “make mouth” that he has done something. We never knew he had something totally different from our thinking, something we had never seen before.

That is why there is a big gulf of difference between a power seeker, who has not only done his home work by having a blueprint of what his people need so badly but knows exactly where the shoes pinch them, and is battle ready to confront it headlong, and a pretender who was co-opted and packaged for the job by godfathers.

While the man who had perfected his home work well would be rolling out innovative projects that touch the soul of the existence of the masses, the pretender would only engage in photocopying and imitating what he has no clue.

Sincerely, a visit to Isikan market, which consists of 366 lock-up shops and 126 open shops, which Mimiko has replicated in Osele Market in Ikare (considered as regional because of its size), Ughale in Ondo (under construction), Ijare Market, Okitipupa, Oba Akoko, New NEPA, Igbokoda, Owo, Ita-Ogbolu, are, would lend credence to the belief that there are still men in Nigeria who do serious thinking to make the corpse walk and improve the environment far, far better than they met it.

Dr Mimiko's concept of neighbourhood market is rooted in his Caring Heart Programme of injecting a human face, adding value and planting projects of excellence that will beautify the landscape of the state.

This concept is turning all the dirty-looking, strikingly wretched, historically ancient markets which previously dotted the state into places of attraction where traders are protected from the harsh visitation of the elements, where their goods are secured, where the basic needed facilities like security, pipe borne water, clinic, crèche, police post, light, are available.

Indeed, Isikan market is a replica of what is obtainable in Ikare, Okitipupa, Owo, Iju, Ita-Ogbolu Igbokoda, in terms of architecture and facilities, except in number and size. It is a row of beautifully designed, open and lock up shops, packaged sensibly to allow enough interaction between sellers and buyers. At Isikan market, the facilities provided were unknown to the history of markets in the South-West of the federation.

Isikan is a market that is fully asphalted, very clean and neat, where you can hardly find dust or dirt which are the common features of markets in Nigeria. And this is a place which used to be waterlogged and unkempt.

This is a market which has 24-hour security guaranteed, a market provided with a crech, police post, clinic, 24-hour solar powered light and boreholes.

Madam Helen Adeyanju, 45, who claimed to have been selling tomato in the market when she was 24, said: "I have been selling tomatoes here since I was 24, and I can tell you what was obtainable during the time of old Isikan and the brand new Isikan which God has used Governor Mimiko to build.

"Nobody could ever have dreamt that this kind of transformation could happen in Isikan market. Even if a prophet had predicted it, we would have doubted the accuracy of his vision. We would have thought it was one of those prophesy made out of inebriation.

"It is only those of us who were sweating it out under the sun and rain then that can fully appreciate and thank God for using this man to rescue us from the debilitating condition and shameful environment of the old Isikan market.

"Then, trading by the roadside was the order of the day, with its dire consequences on our health, psyche and expo to accidents. The market sheds were not organised, while some of us were victims of careless drivers who sometimes abandoned the road to use the market as an alternative.

"Then, trading was done under our route umbrellas; that was even for those who could afford it, or the ramshackle wood or zinc-covered shed which barely sheltered us from the harsh bite of the sun and the rains in a muddy environment littered with filth.

"Governor Mimiko took us off the streets where we constituted nuisance to the public and traffic and allocated to us beautiful rooms inside this hotel.

"And for the fact that he deliberately dignified us at our trading posts, he will never fall and all weapon fashioned against him shall not prosper.

"He put a stop to our humiliation, he halted our being ridiculed and messed up by restoring confidence in us. For the first time, he made us at this market feel the full impact of good governance. We now realise that there is a government in power which really cares about the downtrodden, and for me and my household, we shall never depart from being loyal to this man who feels what we feel, who took steps to expunge our pains and anguish and make us feel great. Such a man will always see the favour of the Lord and his sun that is shining shall never go down.

To Mrs Anthonia Ofido, a native of Enugu who sells soup ingredients and condiments, "one cannot quantify what the governor has done by transforming the slum, which was what the then Isikan market was, to a palatial palace where buying and selling takes place in a very decent, neat and cool environment. If you know the frustration and the challenges that used to confront us during the time of old Isikan, you will have no choice than to join us in praising and appreciating the ingenuity of Mimiko.

"Governor Mimiko saved us from the psychological trauma of those who usually turned our sheds to spiritual bathrooms.

"Then, it was a common occurrence for you to come into your stall early in the morning and find sponge, soap and water used for spiritual cleansing! You are bound again to call your pastor or whoever to clean up the stall, thereby spending time and money which should have been expended on other profitable things.

"Also, because of the way this market is organised and administered with 24-hour security, we no longer carry our wares home, I mean those of us in the open stalls, unlike before when the sheds were not secured and we had to ferry our wares to and fro home. We no longer pay transport fees on these. Thus, we have no reason to transfer charges arising from these to our goods. This has contributed to the cheap prices we offer now."

Abdulahi Aderohunmu, the spokesperson for the butchers at Isikan market, a native of Iwo, Osun State, said: "How do we express our thanks to Dr Mimiko? How do we compensate him for doing what we call something extraordinary? Don't you like this place? Imagine us selling meat in this kind of environment. I am sure you will have confidence in the state of any meat you buy in this kind of environment. Do you notice our appearance? Do you notice how neat our shops are? We too appreciate the environment which has conditioned and reformed our sense of dressing. That butcher is wearing lace materials, see my own attire, can you see the other man there too? We dared not put on this kind of wear at old Isikan market. That means butchers can be natty if the proper environment is provided. This is another thing Mimiko has done. We can never be ungrateful to him."

Christianah Joseph, 38, from Ebonyi State, expressed her feelings and thought in song "I am singing this song on behalf of the extremely poor market women and men whom Mimiko has covered with clothes of honour and dignity by removing us from the streets, far away from the scorching sun and the frequent rains. He has done it for us, he has done it for us, what no governor has ever done, Mimiko has done it for us. And we are grateful."

To Pastor Raphael Afolabi Fadipe, Chief Executive Officer, Oyemekun Rocks Unity Village, "Do you know what impressed me most? One day, I went to Isikan Market. Dressed in white, I drove in leisurely, parked my car conveniently, got a ticket, bought some items, went back to my car and drove pleausrably without any hassles. The floor was not waterlogged as the case used to be, my clothes were not messed up by whatever, in the same Isikan market. This is nothing but a miracle."

He described Mimiko as the ornament of Ondo State who "belongs to the genre of selfless leaders who were purposely created to serve people by making possible things that were previously perceived to be impossible. Who could have thought that Isinkan, I mean Isikan could ever be transformed into an eldorado like this? Who could ever thought that somebody would one day keep street traders off NEPA junction in Akure? Who could ever have believed that the historical Osele market in Ikare, Ughele ale in Ondo, the Igbokoda market, the markets in Owo, Iju, Ita ogbolu and Okitipupa, which were hitherto eyes sores could be turned to tourism centres of attraction and structures of beautification like these. Nobody ever!"

This is because:

Men are flippant lots, Quick in making promises especially when in a competition

With other men for a take home, they run their mouths

Promising heavens and earth, and getting the gold

Only a scanty few, who appreciate the role of history and posterity

As chroniclers of deeds and actions, for this generations and those yet unborn, do fulfill those promises

The noble few.

One of such men is Dr Olusegun Mimiko, the governor of Ondo State, who promised his people that he would transform the ancient markets and build new ones. He did not only keep the promise, but fulfilled it beyond their imagination.

The neighbourhood markets are all there in Ondo State to see. You can't miss these products of ingenuity. They are real. Not propaganda.