



# A Story of Scale: How Nasarawa State Embedded Reform Through Adaptive Partnership



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Nasarawa State has emerged as a leader in the field of reforming the approach to infrastructure development and project preparation in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Leveraging the capacity transferred through a strategic partnership with the UK Nigeria Infrastructure Advisory Facility (UKNIAF), the State Government has been able to embed climate-responsiveness and inclusion as part of infrastructure planning and delivery.

This article explains how technical assistance from UKNIAF led to a successful scaling up of institutional change. It tells the story of a State's transition from receiving technical advisory support to trialling the newly acquired skills and eventually recording major successes as a result. It also highlights the enabling factors and reflects on how emerging risks were addressed along the way.

## The Story of Progress

Nasarawa's journey of transformation **began with UKNIAF's technical advisory support**, which focused on improving infrastructure planning and delivery. Rather than an approach that helicoptered in standalone advice, the UKNIAF team worked with and was guided by existing State processes, building in-house capacity by working alongside government actors. Central to this approach was the transfer and adaptation of global best practices, including the UK Government's 5-case model, and the use of customised tools such as the PGESI tool (which addresses poverty, gender, and climate considerations) and the 360 Project Tool for screening and assessing project viability<sup>2</sup>.

The results have been substantial. Drawing on UKNIAF's tools deployed during the intervention, the State developed and published its own PPP Manual, and Fiscal Contingency and Liability Framework. These tools and documents now guide project decision-making across the State and have **helped unlock additional donor funding**. Notably, the African Climate Foundation awarded Nasarawa \$160,000 to develop and roll out its Climate Policy and Action Plan.

Furthermore, the State **qualified for funding from the World Bank's State Action on Business Enabling Reforms (SABER)** programme by meeting key criteria - including the submission of concept notes and screening assessments produced using the PGESI and Climate Tool.

The *PGESI and Climate Tool* is now being further developed - in part reflecting learning from UKNIAF's experience in Nasarawa State - as the *360° Project Appraisal Tool*. It **integrates evaluation of socio-economic and sustainability aspects of project assessment with bankability, value for money (VfM) and strategic/political economy considerations** in a single guided, structured and sequenced appraisal tool covering the full project development life cycle. This will form one of UKNIAF's key legacy knowledge products aimed at helping government at all levels to successfully realise the development potential of private sector participation in infrastructure.

Importantly, these **reforms have not remained the preserve of a small team within the State government**. The Nasarawa State Investment and Development Agency (NASIDA) acts as a technical hub, supporting other MDAs to apply the 5-case model and the 360° Tool. Officials have become more confident in **evaluating unsolicited proposals and distinguishing viable PPPs from non-viable ones**. This represents a significant cultural shift. As one official described, departments now routinely question consultants, demand justification, and expect work aligned with the standards institutionalised through UKNIAF support.

Stakeholder engagement has also improved remarkably. Participation in project preparation, procurement and delivery workshops is now enthusiastic and widespread, with departments often sending representatives without formal letters of invitation. This shift in morale was attributed not only to improved understanding but also to the **hands-on and respectful approach taken by UKNIAF advisers**.

<sup>1</sup> After the State government leveraged UKNIAF tools and learning to apply for support from the World Bank SABER programme, the latter now presents the State as a model for best practice in project pipeline preparation.

<sup>2</sup> [Business case guidance for projects and programmes - GOV.UK](#); [www.umniaf.ng](http://www.umniaf.ng)



## What Worked

Several factors made this progress possible. First, **there has been visible and consistent political will Nasarawa State**. The Governor's open support lent legitimacy to the reforms and encouraged departments to prioritise participation and implementation. This level of political will meant that technical advice could be more readily acted upon.

Second, the **quality and approach of UKNIAF's support** stood out. Rather than delivering off-the-shelf solutions, advisers worked side-by-side with State actors, explaining not just what to do, but how and why. Their approach **included live demonstrations, back-end tool walkthroughs, and case-based storytelling that contextualised abstract issues like climate and gender in locally meaningful ways**. This not only built internal technical competence but also generated a sense of ownership, respect, and partnership.

Third, **the support was inclusive and adaptive. UKNIAF worked across MDAs** - from Finance to Land, Public Procurement, the State Information Geography Service (NAGIS) - and did not confine its efforts to a single unit. By involving a wide range of actors, the tools and approaches gained broader legitimacy. Flexibility was another key enabler: **as the partnership evolved, UKNIAF extended support to areas of emerging need**, such as the application of screening tools, the drafting of concept notes, and support for climate-smart infrastructure planning.

A final enabler was the emphasis on localisation. **Discussions about gender, social inclusion or sustainability were not framed in abstract policy terms but linked to recognisable, real-life concerns** - such as girls' access to safe hostels or the economic impacts of energy-efficient design. These relatable examples helped overcome resistance and fostered acceptance across sectors.

## Managing risks

Despite the strong progress, risks remained. One significant concern was the **sustainability of reforms if key individuals were to leave**. This risk was recognised early, and steps were taken to mitigate it. Knowledge was cascaded through training sessions targeting both mid- and junior-level staff. NASIDA created a community of practice, supported by documentation and templates that captured key processes. These measures ensured that knowledge and tools were not limited to a few people but shared across the system.

Another risk lay in the **limited appetite for project preparation funding**. Many decision-makers traditionally

prioritised physical infrastructure over the less visible but essential preparatory work. Here, too, progress was made by demonstrating the tangible benefits of preparation - both in terms of attracting donor funding and ensuring project viability. Tools like the 360 Project Tool enabled officials to screen proposals early, preventing wasted effort on non-viable projects.

A third challenge related to the **short-term nature of UKNIAF's initial engagement**. Some stakeholders expressed concern that progress might stall without longer-term support. While UKNIAF extended its assistance incrementally, some valuable opportunities - such as support for a Statewide Infrastructure Master Plan - remained under-resourced. Looking ahead, more structured commitments to long-term technical partnerships may be needed to further consolidate reforms.

There was also a desire among state officials for more direct engagement between UKNIAF and high-level political actors. It was suggested **that direct briefings to the Governor could have accelerated decision-making**, particularly when funding or policy endorsements were required. While UKNIAF's work was intentionally non-political, this recommendation points to the value of strategic engagement at multiple levels of government.



## Conclusion

Nasarawa State's experience demonstrates that technical assistance, when well-delivered and contextually grounded, can catalyse significant institutional change. By embedding tools, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and building internal capacity, the UKNIAF partnership helped shift how the State conceives and manages infrastructure projects.

The story is one of both visible results and deeper systemic change. It also offers a lesson: reform efforts are most likely to succeed when technical assistance is delivered respectfully, embedded within local processes, and adapted to local realities. While challenges remain, Nasarawa's trajectory suggests that with the right enablers, lasting change is possible.



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