



# Kwara State

## Nigeria's Garden of Eden

It is easy to overlook Kwara State, tucked up against Nigeria's western border, between the country's Southern lowlands and Northern highlands, and for many years most people did just that. Even the State Governor, His Excellency Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki, concedes that until recently few people knew about Kwara State. In a very short space of time, that image has now been overturned, so much that following a presidential visit in 2005, other states were exhorted to imitate the successful measures employed there, a scenario almost unimaginable only a few years before.

Those measures are largely the brainchild of Governor Saraki, something of a renaissance man, whose career in politics followed stints in both medicine and finance. The governor finished his education in England where A-levels at Cheltenham were followed by 5 years at London Hospital Medical College, (England's oldest medical school). Dr. Saraki then spent 5 years practicing medicine in British hospitals, the last 3 as Senior Casualty Officer at the Royal Free London Hospital. From 1993 Governor Saraki attended a number of courses in finance and management, leading to a new career in the business world, which saw him rise to Executive Vice-Chairman at Société Générale in Nigeria by 2001.

In 2003, when he came to office as the 4th Executive Governor, Kwara was still in the backwaters; utterly dependent on federal allocations, and the civil service accounting for 75% of those in formal employment. The dearth of job opportunities was manifesting itself in increasing youth violence, and Kwara's epithet, "State of Harmony", was beginning to ring hollow. His inauguration was marked with talk of "a generation that is desperately challenged by the rapid developments taking place all over the world". Rousing words however, are common in Nigerian politics; it is rousing actions that are harder to come by. Fortunately for the people of Kwara State, businessman Bukola Saraki has shown himself more than equal to the task, bringing his experience of the private sector and applying it to the enormous management challenges he faced in his new career in governance.

Before proposing a development plan for Kwara, the Governor posed some critical questions: "What do we want to be known for? What do we have to contribute to the rest of the world?" The answer, according to the Governor, lay in commercial farming, an industry sidelined by the dominance of the hydrocarbon sector in Nigeria's economy. Not only would this provide the jobs the state so badly needed, it would also allow the state to reinvent itself. "In today's world" he advises, "the market is the most effective tool of re-branding." In order for a revitalized agricultural sector to flourish, the state's infrastructure and power supply had to be overhauled, and the goal of making Kwara a net producer of food, and therefore an example for all of Nigeria, would be within reach. Kwara may not have the mineral wealth of such naturally endowed areas as the Niger Delta, but Governor Saraki believes that "even with our meagre resources, the dividends of democracy can go round."

### Greenland

The Government is convinced that no other sector has as much potential to drive poverty reduction initiatives and jump-start economic development as agriculture. It is therefore in agriculture that Kwara State wishes to carve its niche in both the national and international economy. "Our vision is to lead the way in changing Nigeria's reliance on imported food" declares Governor

Saraki, "we will make Kwara State a net producer of food and agricultural products both for the huge domestic market, and for export."

The Governor is aware that most foreigners do not readily associate agriculture with Nigeria. Indeed he prefaced a speech at the 2006 World AG Expo in California by saying, "Nigeria may be known to the outside world as a major oil producer, but the mainstay of its economy is actually agriculture." He went on to explain that "although petro-dollars account for 98 per cent of national revenue, the agriculture sector employs more than 70 per cent of our population. Close to three decades of oil wealth has not changed this equation."

So when he proposed the agriculture sector as the cornerstone of the state's development, there must have been some disappointment amongst young unemployed Kwarans. Farming was something old people did, people who had no choice; it hardly seemed the most exciting ticket for Kwara to join the twenty-first century. This perception is drawn from small scale farming, which unfortunately still dominates in many parts of Africa. The Governor himself acknowledges that most farmers in their 60s or 70s, working 1 or 2 hectares are relying on age-old practices. The majority of such farmers are grossly under-employed and under-productive and, often without any formal education, they lack basic management skills or the ability to learn from new technologies. "They rely on obsolete implements and constantly wait on the rain for farming," explains the Governor, and "because they lack education, they are unable to access funds and therefore rely on the government for subsidies on major farm inputs like seedling, fertilizers, and pesticides." So the new agricultural policy of the Kwara State Government is "rooted in the realization of the need to stop doing things in the conventional way of the past, in order to launch the state into a new era of food sufficiency and economic prosperity".

What is most impressive about this new era is the speed and breadth of support that has been offered to local farmers, from education right through to marketing of value added products. Fertilisers and machinery have been heavily subsidised, storage and processing facilities built or rehabilitated, and, perhaps most importantly, jobs created. Lots of jobs. Creating employment for the youth of Kwara State remains the tireless goal of the Governor. So far, at least 25,000 jobs have been created from agriculture and that figure continues to rise every month.

The process started when The Back-To-Farm Programme begun in June 2003, just one month after the inauguration of the first Saraki administration. It was a mobilisation programme, providing credit facilities to farmers in the form of seedlings, fertilizers and land cultivation. From the initial 100 farmers that participated in the inaugural phase in 2003, that figure increased more than tenfold, bringing 1600 hectares of land under cultivation with rice, cassava and maize being the dominant crops.

Ultimately, the results were not as good as hoped for from this pilot programme. It did serve, however, to underline the need for a more radical solution to overcome years of inertia and bad habits ingrained in the local sector. Governor Saraki realised that he needed to improve much more than credit facilities. What was required was to groom a whole new generation of farmers skilled both in the techniques of modern farming and modern financing, capable of managing a farm as a business with a clear focus on profitability. In order to do that, he came up with a solution that would make headlines across Africa.

## The New Nigerian Farmer

In radically overhauling Kwara State's agricultural policy, Governor Saraki's most daring move was to invite displaced white Zimbabwean farmers to take up land concessions in Shonga district, a development that would not be out of place in a Hollywood script. Like all good stories, the proposal was met with much cynicism on both sides, the stakes were undoubtedly high, and the tale has its heroes and villains (Mr Mugabe was not a fan). Receiving the farmers in Abuja on their first visit to Nigeria, then President Obasanjo declared, "while Nigeria would not like to take away from Zimbabwe what is good for Zimbabweans, we, in the spirit of African brotherhood, would like to keep in Africa what is good for Africa."

They were invited to Kwara and given a tour of the farmlands. The logic behind such strenuous efforts is simple. Governor Saraki knew these farmers were getting yields at least two or three times higher than those commonly achieved in Nigeria. Indeed when this expertise was excised from the Zimbabwean economy, farming output in the country shrank to one fifth of its former levels. It seemed a perfect opportunity for Zimbabweans and Nigerians to work together for their mutual benefit. "Having studied the outstanding success of commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe, we reached out to some of the farmers who had been displaced by the land reforms in that country," recounts the Governor. "We succeeded in bringing 13 of them to Kwara State to pioneer our commercial agriculture initiative. This initiative started in 2005 with each farmer awarded at least 1,000 hectares of land on the banks of the River Niger".

Of course, the challenges were substantial; from initial local opposition (hardly surprising when land concessions are involved), to the question of financing. Since most of the farmers had escaped persecution in Zimbabwe with little more than the clothes on their back, they had little equity to bring to the table. Meetings were arranged between the farmers and financial institutions, and with government support, they were able to secure substantial commercial loans. \$7.5 million was set aside for road networks, irrigation, health facilities and water and power supply; and another \$10 million as working capital. More than twice this amount has been spent on the project to date.

From the point of view the Zimbabweans, the experience has also been positive. Despite their gruelling experiences in southern Africa, they undertook the new challenges with relish: "We arrived to virgin bush" remembers Irvin Reid, one of the original 13 farmers to arrive. "We were basically given GPS points, told to mark them out, clear the bush, build the house and sheds, and import the cattle. It was fun, we all lived in tents for a while." Reid now has 300 Jersey cows producing milk, though the local sector has its idiosyncrasies as Paul Retzlaff, CEO of Pine Leigh Farms and another Zimbabwean expat explains: "It is difficult to market fresh milk to the local consumers who have a fixation for powdered milk. We are however creating a strong awareness for the product and have started diversifying into other dairy products such as yogurt, which does have a large market in Nigeria." "Currently Nigeria, imports 248,000 metric tonnes (almost a billion dollars) of powdered milk a year, but if just some of those consumers switch their preference to fresh milk (which is already being delivered to the State's schools) then the untapped market is enormous" explains Professor Mohammed G. Yisa, Honourable Commissioner of Agriculture and Natural Resources for the State. Current

investments in dairy production in Kwara will yield up to 5 million litres of milk per annum; while that may be enough to satisfy the current market, once Nigerians get a taste for real milk then that demand is likely to rise exponentially. Increased supply will also drive down prices and overcome supply bottlenecks.

The Malete Youth Farm is the vehicle through which the expertise of the Zimbabwean farmers will be passed on to the new generation of Nigerian farmers. The State Government's strategic initiative is located about 45 kilometers from Ilorin, the State capital. It was previously used as a seed farm, but had been abandoned for a number of years. In a typical move of the Saraki government, the 200-hectare farm has been completely rehabilitated, and expanded to 800 hectares to accommodate both students and the commercial activity of the farm itself. The course is aimed at young men and women in their twenties interested in pursuing a career in commercial agriculture. They are trained in a wide range of agricultural practices from soil and animal husbandry, irrigation and maintenance of farm machinery, to crop harvesting and storage. They are also taught the necessary skills in labour management, finance, and marketing to keep the farms running efficiently.

If the Youth Farm at Malete represents the future of farming in Kwara State, then the Zimbabwean expats are the bridge. Indeed the farm at Malete was originally managed by one of the Zimbabweans, who are now happy to go by the name of New Nigerian farmers. Their techniques and knowledge have laid the foundations for the agricultural revolution that Governor Saraki envisages so clearly. How the rest of the structure emerges will depend on those 100 young men and women that pass through Malete each year.

Meanwhile, across the State, cassava yields and processing levels are on the rise, rice production has been revolutionised by the development of dry season rice, and cashew nut processing plants have been built. Irrigation is playing an increasingly important role in Kwara State and over 2000 hectares are currently irrigated, almost exclusively for rice production. "Because of their exclusive dependence on rain", continues Governor Saraki "our farmers can only plant once a year, thereby severely limiting their productivity. With irrigation however, they can farm throughout the year and achieve double cropping". An early trial of this was the irrigated rice scheme in Duku-Lade. The irrigation facility was built in the 1960s though the facilities had long since broken down and remained abandoned for many years until the scheme was renewed by the Saraki administration. The first 200 hectares of dry season rice were a resounding success, and the irrigation system now has an installed capacity of 4,000 hectares.

This is a pattern that has repeated itself many times over the last 6 years. The Government recognizes that "it is only when agricultural production is radically increased to a level that would allow easy linkage with allied economic activities like production, collection, storage, transportation, processing, and packaging, that agriculture can be used to drive other development objectives. Therefore, while efforts are made to organize, support and mobilise local peasant farmers for large scale production, the commercial agricultural practices are also programmed to have multiple trickle down effects in raising the standards in peasant farming practices." These efforts have earned the Governor accolades, not just within Kwara, or Nigeria but internationally. He was awarded the Best African Governor in Agriculture in 2005 in Johannesburg, and Best African Governor by the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation in 2006.



## Kwara State Government Ministry of Agriculture

"Join the Greener Pastures of Nigeria"



## From Ground to Retail

As is the case with irrigation schemes, the State Government found that many other plans for agricultural and infrastructure development were sound, but they were abandoned due to the lack of funds, lack of maintenance, and most of all a lack of political will. Deputy Governor Chief Joel Afolabi Ogundeji underlines another example, “Years ago, Nigeria was one of the biggest producers of cocoa; however, when oil was discovered cocoa plantations were simply abandoned. We intend to restart that industry in parts of the state, especially in forested areas, where cocoa thrives.”

At the other end of the production line is another key element of the agricultural reform plan: food processing. In Kwara State, as in most parts of Nigeria, most fruits and vegetables are sold or bartered to domestic consumers while the market is flooded with imported canned and packaged fruit juices and tomato purees. “We have been producers of raw materials for too long,” laments Governor Saraki. “Because of the failure to add value to our produce, our farmers end up working for manufacturers. For every dollar earned by the local cassava farmer, traders and firms further up the value chain receive \$13.”

The State intends to replicate the Asian business model by establishing small production and processing units for poultry, dairy products, fruits, cassava, cashew and sugar cane. The cashew industry offers another clear example of how Kwarans can claim more of the value chain. Traditionally, raw cashews have been bought by Indian merchants, taken to India for processing, and then exported to The United States. “Our plan was simply to process the cashew nuts ourselves and export them directly from Ilorin to Atlanta” says the Governor. So the State now boasts of the OLAM Cashew Processing Factory, revived with funds from Singapore, a country whose own efficiency sets global benchmarks. The plant has over 1,500 workers on its pay-roll, all of whom are provided with free accommodation and a subsidized transport system. At full capacity, the factory is capable of processing 13,000 metric tons of cashew nuts every year and the state is now seeking more investors in this sector.

The arrival of Kentucky Fried Chicken in Lagos has underscored the potential of the poultry market. While burgers may dominate in the United States, it is chicken that rules the roost in West Africa. Shonga farms is working on an agreement to supply Chicken Republic, but the industry has a long way to go before it can meet local demand. “We envisage that all these initiatives will, in time, position Kwara State as a leading producer of processed fruits, as well as sugar, poultry and cashews, for both the domestic and export market” concludes Governor Saraki. Ben Duntoye, the State Commissioner of Information and Communications summarises these developments in a different light: “We are becoming less independent on the country’s oil revenue, to the extent that to us in a matter of years, the price of it will not matter.”

Kwara State’s relationship with the outside world is adapting to reflect the profound changes taking place in the state’s economic structure. A vital component of that relationship is the development of Ilorin International Airport, which has been re-designated and equipped as a specialised Cargo airport, offering clients a welcome alternative to the frequently congested Lagos Airport. Its customers benefit from significant advantages including around the clock operations, 24-hour customs, efficient handling and excellent value. It also houses a new state-of-the-art passenger terminal, opened in June 2006, which provides facilities that meet international standards.

“Ilorin International Airport is strategically located and perfectly positioned to serve Nigeria and neighbouring countries” announces the Governor. “I am wholly committed to the success of our airport upgrade and the significant benefits that will accrue to its customers and the people of Kwara State”. The necessary development in human resources will be handled by the Ilorin College of Aviation which will train world-class aviation technicians with a key focus on efficiency and safety. The aim of the college is not just to plug human resource gaps but to enhance the efficiency of Nigeria’s aviation industry in line with global standards.

## Powering Ilorin and Beyond

One of the major drawbacks for businesses in Nigeria is energy. Up until early 2009, Kwara was no different from many others parts of Nigeria, as it suffered from a feeble and sporadic power supply. If the experience in Kwara State is anything to go by, improved power supply across the country will have a dramatic effect on the overall business environment. “Recently, we overcame short-



falls in federal funding to complete a power sub-station at Gamno” explains Governor Saraki. “The financial burden to the state has been high, but it has had an instant impact on the economy. Average power supply to both industrial and residential areas has increased from a few hours a day to 18-24 hours a day.” It also means that Kwara is one of the few States with 330KVA lines, meaning that the State gets its supply of electricity directly from the generating centre, rather than the secondary distribution centre.

“We are delighted to receive reports from both private companies and federal establishments such as universities that their expenditure on diesel has gone down by between 80% and 90%. The savings to these existing corporations have been calculated at about 2.5 billion naira per annum.” Of course there are powerful social benefits too in terms of education, training, and allowing skilled citizens to go back to their primary trades and crafts. “This project has become one of the fastest growth drivers in our bid for industrial expansion, and consequently, a catalyst for employment generation,” summarises the Governor. “This is also a major platform for wooing investors to come to Kwara State and invest in a power-steady environment.”

The work does not end there though. To ensure stability for at least the next 20 years, and to maintain the advantage that Kwara currently enjoys, the State Government has begun investing in transmission and distribution programmes and contracts have been awarded for the supply and installation of six further transformers at a cost of 1 billion naira (6 million USD).

## Looking into the Future

A recent bestseller on managing housework advised readers to clean their kitchen sink before going to bed. The author postulated that psychology was half the battle, and if the first thing you saw when you got up was a messy sink, you’d struggle for the rest of the day. Governor Saraki seems to have been working along the same lines. In 2003, Ilorin was a mess, badly designed, with poor sanitation and zero recycling. But at stake was not just aesthetics; a prime indicator of poverty is unhealthy and squalid living conditions. Apart from undermining the health of the people, they also foster crime. The Governor launched ‘Clean & Green’ to combat the capital’s refuse strewn streets. The results have been remarkable. An army of 2,000 people (predominantly youth and women) set forth daily to empty recycling bins, clear blocked drains, maintain the roads, and keep the city sparkling clean. Meanwhile, avenues are being lined with trees, parks upgraded, and congested squares cleared. The city has, in short, been given one serious facelift, and the inhabitants are thrilled with their new look.

In order to put into perspective the achievements made since 2003, it is necessary to appreciate the chaos Governor Saraki faced on coming to office. The coffers were almost empty, there was almost no investment in the State, and every single aspect of social welfare was desperately underfunded, none more so than healthcare.

Incredibly, not a single member of medical staff was recruited in the 12 years prior to 2003. Not one. In the first 12 months after 2003, 26 Doctors, 50 nurses and eight Pharmacists were employed. Thirty-six hospitals are currently undergoing refurbishment and medical staff is undergoing aggressive training programs. New diagnostic facilities are currently being constructed and specialised equipment has been ordered from Germany. Meanwhile, the brand new Kwara State University has just accepted its first intake of 500 students. The university will begin academic activities with five colleges spread across the three campuses. “We cannot hope to be a world class player if we do not provide world class education” reasons Governor Saraki.

The necessary changes to provide that education are being implemented, but the State Government has found that the entire system needs overhauling. Research carried out by the State Department of Education found that too many students could still not read or write. In response, the State launched a comprehensive education reform plan tagged 'Every Child Counts' in 2008, which among other things promised to improve school efficiency and learning achievements. An assessment carried out shockingly reveals that a majority of school teachers in the State could not do well in Primary 4 literacy and numeracy test, but it also points the way in the kind of training required to improve the quality of teaching in the schools. A new career path is also being charted for teachers, to make their promotions predictable and award higher salaries as incentives. Once teaching skills improve, then the students will start to improve. But for the time being, Kwara high school students still underperform in college entrance exams, though the West Africa Examination Council and the Federal Ministry of Education have commended the state for eradicating exam malpractices.

Whilst rising education levels will secure the future of the Kwara people, it is healthcare that addresses their current needs. One of the earliest successes of the Governor's healthcare policies is the Polio eradication programme. In 2003, immunization coverage for polio was at a weighted average of 36.2%. By 2006 that figure had risen to 66% and by early 2009, to 95% of the population, an impressive achievement, especially if you factor in the hindrance caused by traditional fears of needles and immunization in rural Africa. Unfortunately, fighting polio is not something that can be undertaken unilaterally. All Nigerian states need to work on the issue and Governor Saraki has brought to bear his leverage as head of the Nigerian Governors' Council in order to push on with the national eradication programme.

The basis for the state's future healthcare policy is now firmly fixed on prevention rather than cure, a well-known adage, perhaps, but one that is all too rarely heeded. "I always say that there are two policies that give me a lot of satisfaction. One of them is what we are doing in Agriculture; the other one is what we are doing in community health insurance." The health insurance scheme is the first of its kind, a collaboration between The Dutch government, a Dutch insurance company, a Nigerian health insurance company and the Kwara state government. Between them they have managed to subsidise the cost of health insurance, bringing the price right down to just 200 naira, or just over one dollar, per annum. The Governor believes that primary health care should be the main conduit for all health funding, including philanthropic donations to mitigate the effects of diseases such as polio, malaria and AIDS. "My view is that funds should all go together into the primary health care-system, to create a more holistic approach. For just 200 naira a year you can undergo all the basic tests, from prenatal to malaria treatment. By doing this we are locking people into the system." The scheme has recently been launched in Lagos State as well. It seems that Kwara's healthcare policies, like their agricultural ones, are proving just as popular outside the State as inside.

## Stars in the Making

It is clear the future of a nation depends solely on the quality of its youth. Youth academies around the world have become the cradle where young talent is nurtured. There is no doubt Governor Saraki firmly believes in this, as proven by the Kwara Football Academy (KFA), one of the investments he is most proud of. Students from diverse backgrounds and cultures become a team when they practice and play the one thing that brings them together, football. While developing youth potential, the academy also makes dreams come true, as was the case of a young man from Kwara State who was recently spotted by renowned football manager, Jose Mourinho, and who is in the process of signing with Benfica from Portugal, a legendary European football team.

Yet KFA is much more than a dream maker; the football academy not only expects to sign another ten players this year with top international teams, but is also the only academy in the country that houses all of its youth, providing them with housing and tuition while they are encouraged to develop their skills and pursue their dreams.

By establishing a centre for youth development using football as the medium, Governor Saraki appealed to the private sector to invest in the multi-million dollar ultra modern Kwara Football Academy which he believes holds the future of Nigerian football.

## Why is Kwara Nigeria's best Kept Secret?

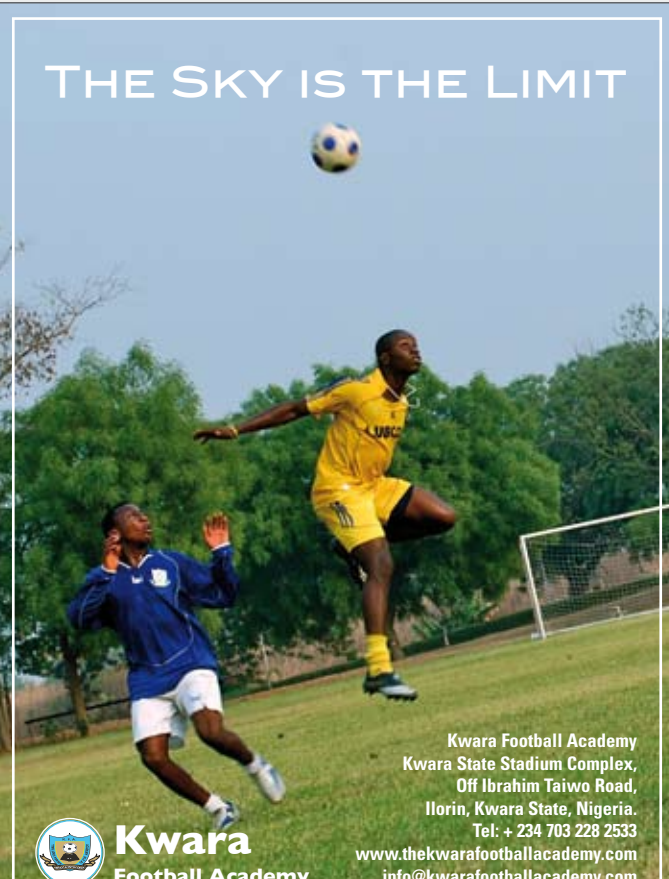
It should come as no surprise that the Governor views foreign investment as a vital component of his ambitious reform plans. He adds some perspective to his aims: "When I came into government, civil employment was everything, either the government employed you or at least someone from your family relied on the government for work. What I hope to achieve by the time I end my mandate is to diversify the economy. The majority of my policies are directed towards creating a more competitive business environment."

Kwara is undoubtedly a vastly more attractive proposition for investors than it was six years ago. This is also largely due to highly improved governance that is based on greater fiscal efficiency and accountability. These positive developments have been recognised not just in Nigeria, or even Africa, but globally; in June 2009 Fitch Ratings awarded Kwara State a National long-term rating of AA- (minus) and confirmed the outlook for the rating is stable. Kwara is the first Nigerian state to be assigned a credit rating by an international rating agency. The Governor rather modestly agrees that "the affirmation of the ratings is an indication of the steady progress we have recorded over the last six years".


With the finishing touches going on at the cargo airport and all the development projects on schedule, the present administration in Kwara "is set to deliver on its promise to lay a solid foundation for economic empowerment, wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction for its citizens."

But plenty of work remains in Kwara, and with it, opportunities for investors in many different sectors, from constructing power plants to roads, from hospitals to hotels, and of course in agriculture. The Governor has done his part; all that remains is for investors to give Kwara a chance. "Real and enduring re-branding can only come through achievements" concludes Governor Saraki, "and by deliberate efforts at building a portfolio of assets and accomplishments that will force people to take a second look at you, and judge you by what you contribute to the world, politically, socially and economically."

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT



**Kwara Football Academy**  
 Kwara State Stadium Complex,  
 Off Ibrahim Taiwo Road,  
 Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.  
 Tel: + 234 703 228 2533  
[www.thekwarafootballacademy.com](http://www.thekwarafootballacademy.com)  
[info@kwarafootballacademy.com](mailto:info@kwarafootballacademy.com)



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