

# VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS

## Nigeria needs athletics revolution – Ijirigho

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athletics

Former Nigerian international athlete, Bruce Ijirigho has urged Nigerian state governors to emulate their Cross Rivers counterpart, Liyel Imoke who started a grassroots athletics programme with potentials to produce top quality athletes for the country.

The 1972 Munich Olympics Games 400m semi-finalist, said that athletics in Nigerian is suffering retrogression, because the structures left by the colonial powers have been demolished. He said that Cross Rivers State was trying to re-create that same structure, which produced world class athletes for Nigeria and other states should follow the example.

Athletics have been made compulsory in primary and secondary schools in Cross Rivers, with consultants like Ijirigho, Charlton Ehizuele and Lee Evans driving a development programme for the talents discovered from the schools.

“If we can have what we are doing here in Cross Rivers in three other states there will be athletics revolution.

“ Right now in Nigeria, there is no developmental programme for grassroots athletes. What most states are interested in doing is to wait till the national sports festival, collect money from the government and attend.

“We are not producing athletes, but we want to achieve results. For instance most of the junior athletes going to the Youth Olympics are overage.

“We cannot expect them to reach their peak when they are running with young boys and girls from other countries,” said Ijirigho.

He concluded that the programme in Cross Rivers will encourage the growth of Nigerian athletics. And he called on states like Delta and Edo with a rich athletics tradition to start a similar back school athletics grassroots programme, rather than spend money on already developed athletes.