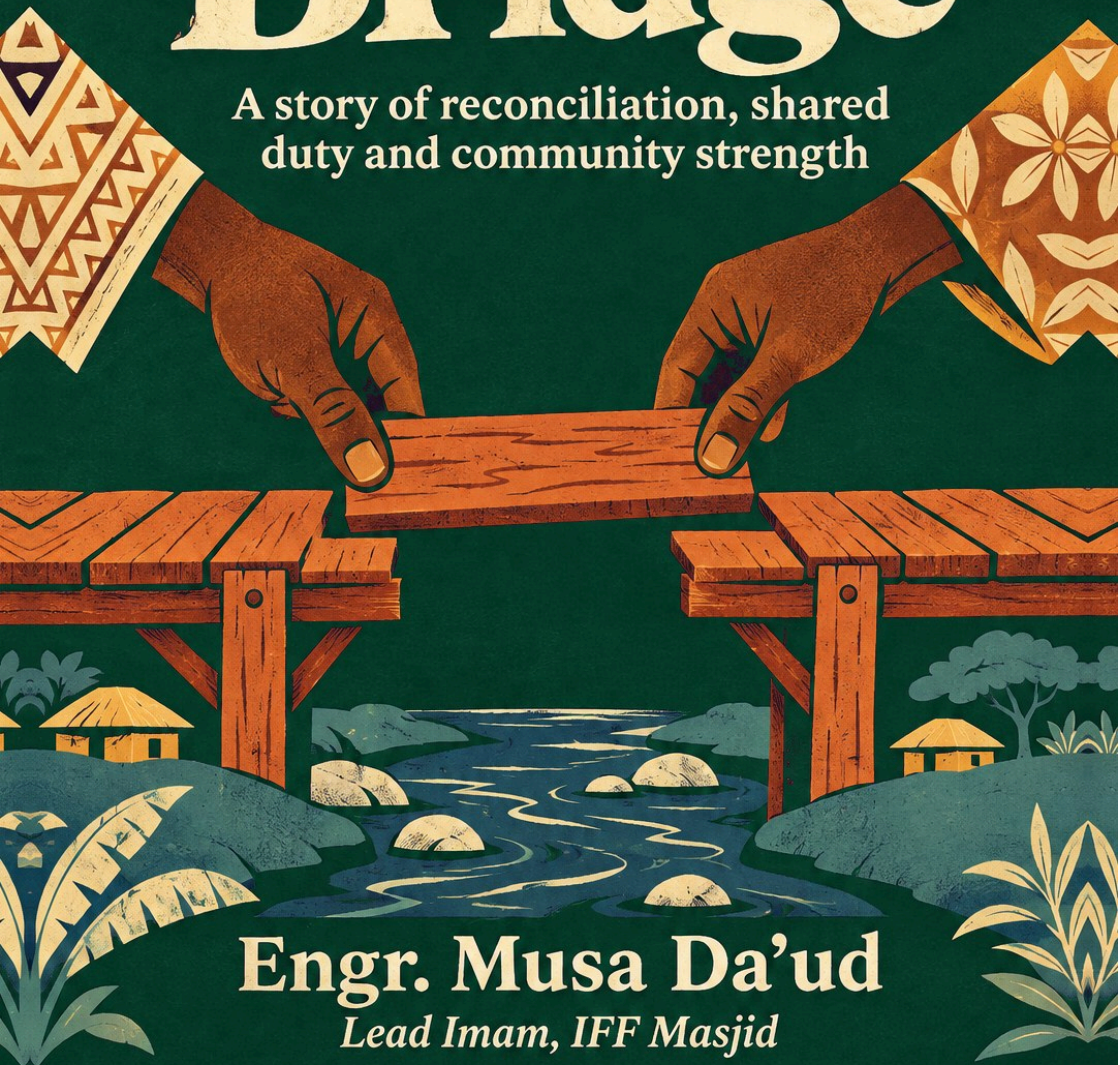
The Broken Bridge

A story of reconciliation, shared duty and community strength



Engr. Musa Da'ud

Lead Imam, IFF Masjid

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DEDICATION

To the pillars of our homes and the youth who carry our tomorrow—may every disagreement be met with patience, and every division healed by the strength of our shared bonds.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Every community is built upon invisible connections—the quiet agreements of mutual respect, the shared maintenance of our public spaces, and the patience we extend to one another across generational and ideological divides. The Broken Bridge was born out of a simple observation: that physical or social rifts in our neighborhoods are rarely repaired by force or anger, but by the deliberate, courageous act of sitting together under the shade trees and listening.

In writing this story, my hope is to offer young readers and mentors alike a mirror for reflection. The disputes between Baba Garba and Mama Chinyere are reflections of the everyday friction we all encounter in families, workplaces, and communities. Yet, as Alh. Moussa reminds us, a foundation laid in anger crumbles with the first rain, while trust built on shared responsibility and restorative compromise endures for generations.

May this story inspire you to look at the "broken bridges" in your own sphere with grace, to honor the contributions of those who walk beside you, and to always remember that the strongest bridge of all is the one built between human hearts.

— Engr. Musa Da'ud, Lead Imam IFF Masjid

CHAPTER 1

The Gathering Storm

The wooden footbridge spanning the shallow stream had begun to rot long before the first heated words were spoken. For years, it had served as the sole connection between the upper compound, home to Baba Garba's family, and the lower settlement where Mama Chinyere's household resided.

Trouble flared on a dusty Thursday afternoon. Baba Garba's heavy cattle, carrying his harvest bound for the local market, cracked the central wooden beam. The bridge buckled, leaving a dangerous gap over the rocky gulley.

By evening, voices rose sharply near the banks. Mama Chinyere stood at the edge of the gap, gesturing angrily across the water. "Your heavy loads broke the only crossing our children use for school! It is your duty to replace the timber!"

Baba Garba crossed his arms tightly, leaning against his walking staff. "Your traders drag overloaded baskets across every day! My family cut the original logs years ago. We will not be blamed for years of public wear!"

Accusations flew back and forth, drawing neighbors from both sides. The argument threatened to split the settlement in two, until Alh. Moussa walked down the gentle slope from the community grounds, raising his hand to pause the escalating dispute.

CHAPTER 2

Under the Shade Trees

The shade tree offered a cool, dappled relief from the midday sun, but the air beneath its branches remained thick with unspent anger. Alh. Moussa unrolled a woven mat onto the packed earth, his movements deliberate and unhurried.

"Sit," Alh. Moussa said softly, gesturing to the ground. "The sun is hot, but our words do not need to be."

Baba Garba sat first, stiff-backed, his eyes fixed firmly on the shallow stream ahead. Mama Chinyere adjusted her headtie with a sharp tug before taking her seat across from him, keeping her distance.

Alh. Moussa looked from one to the other, letting the breeze through the leaves fill the silence before laying out the path forward. "A bridge that carries only one man's weight is not a bridge—it is a trap. Baba Garba, your family holds the timber that can make the crossing sound again. Mama Chinyere, your household has the young, energetic hands that can raise it."

Baba Garba immediately shifted, folding his arms tight across his chest. "Why should my prime mahogany be cut down for a path that her traders run ragged with heavy carts? My timber is for my family's legacy, not to patch up public neglect."

Across the mat, Mama Chinyere's hand flew to her hip, her chin rising. "Neglect? It was your heavy cattle that cracked the structural footings in the first place! Now you want our boys to sweat under the afternoon heat while your family sits back and claims ownership of the land?"

Alh. Moussa raised a quiet hand, his voice steadying the rising heat. “Baba Garba, wood resting in a grove yields no shade for your grandchildren if the path to the market is cut off. Giving your timber does not mean you have lost a debate; it means your family’s strength is the very foundation holding this village together.”

He turned to Mama Chinyere, his eyes warm. “And Mama Chinyere, sending the youth to build is not labor traded away—it is teaching them that they own a piece of every plank they lay down. If they build it, they will guard it.”

Baba Garba looked away, his jaw working as he weighed the words. He looked toward the grove, then down at the splintered wood of the old crossing. Slowly, his shoulders lowered. The tightness in his chest relaxed as the framing shifted—his timber would not be stolen; it would be honored.

“The mahogany near the riverbank is seasoned,” Baba Garba muttered, his voice quiet but clear. “It will hold against the rains. I will mark the trees myself tomorrow morning.”

Mama Chinyere looked at Baba Garba, her sharp expression softening into surprise. She settled back onto the mat, smoothing her wrapper over her knees. A faint, respectful nod escaped her before she caught herself.

“If the timber is ready by sunrise,” she said, her tone calm and steady, “the boys will be there with axes and ropes before the morning dew clears.”

Alh. Moussa smiled, leaning back against the trunk of the shade tree. “Then the bridge is already built in our hearts. All that remains is to lay the wood.”

CHAPTER 3

The Rebuilding under the Morning Sun

The sun was barely a pale gold horizon when the sound of footsteps echoed down the dusty path toward the stream bed. The morning air was crisp, carrying the earthly scent of dew-laden grass and fresh sawdust.

Baba Garba arrived first, trailing behind two sturdy oxen hauling four massive, freshly sawn logs of seasoned mahogany. His two sons walked beside him, carrying heavy wooden mallets, thick hemp ropes, and broad iron chisels. Baba Garba stopped near the broken span, placing his hand on the smooth, polished bark of the lead log.

Minutes later, Mama Chinyere rounded the bend leading a dozen energetic youth from her side of the settlement. They carried heavy iron hoes, iron buckets, and woven baskets for clearing earth.

For a moment, as the two groups met at the water's edge, a brief silence fell over the bank. The past days of harsh words hung lightly in the air, but the shared work ahead quickly silenced the remaining tension.

Alh. Moussa stepped forward from the foot of the shade trees, wearing a clean, crisp kaftan, his walking stick resting lightly in his hand.

"A foundation laid in anger crumbles with the first rain," Alh. Moussa said, his voice carrying clearly across the quiet valley.

“Today, we do not just build a crossing over water; we rebuild the trust beneath our feet. Let every log set be a promise kept.”

With a nod from Baba Garba, the work began:

> **Clearing the Foundation.** Mama Chinyere’s crew split into two teams. The first cleared the tangled thickets of wild weeds and river silt that had compromised the stone abutments, while the second hauled smooth river boulders to reinforce the embankments.

> **Laying the Structural Beams.** Guided by Baba Garba’s precise hand, the young men tied heavy ropes around the mahogany beams. Working in rhythm—pulling to rhythmic chants—they heaved the massive logs across the banks, seating them deep into the newly carved stone footings.

> **Securing the Decking.** Together, the youths and Baba Garba’s sons drove heavy wooden pegs into the cross-joints, securing wide timber planks across the span.

By midday, where a dangerous, broken gap once stood, a broad, sturdy bridge of deep red mahogany spanned the stream bed, solid enough to bear the weight of heavy market carts, cattle, and running children alike.

CHAPTER 4

The Shared Feast and the First Steps

The late afternoon sun cast a warm, golden glow across the newly finished mahogany bridge. The air, once filled with the rhythmic thud of wooden mallets and iron chisels, now carried the rich, inviting aroma of firewood, spiced soups, and crushed grain.

At the edge of the embankment, near the foot of the old shade trees, low wooden tables and woven mats were laid out in a wide semicircle. Women from both households had joined forces to prepare a collective celebration meal. Large earthenware bowls held steaming mountains of pounded cassava, pots of rich egusi soup, and roasted corn. Pots of freshly squeezed organic sugarcane juice were set out in clay pitchers, keeping cool in the shadow of the bridge posts.

Village elders, young laborers, and running children gathered around the feast. Baba Garba and Mama Chinyere sat side by side on the central mat, the sharp silence that once divided them replaced by the comfortable noise of a community at peace.

Alh. Moussa stood at the crest of the riverbank, raising his hands to bring a gentle quiet over the gathering.

“A bridge is useless if no one has the courage to cross it,” Alh. Moussa said, looking down at the broad red-mahogany timber spanning the stream. “The wood and stone hold our weight, but it is our shared respect that keeps us upright. Today, we do not cross as two separate banks, but as one people.”

Alh. Moussa then turned to the youngest children from both households—Baba Garba's four-year-old grandson and Mama Chinyere's young granddaughter. He took each by the hand and guided them to the edge of the new crossing.

"Take the first steps together," Alh. Moussa urged softly with a warm smile.

Hand in hand, the two children took their first timid steps onto the smooth mahogany planks. The bridge stood firm and silent beneath them. As they broke into a run across to the opposite bank, laughter erupted across the gathering. Baba Garba shared a quiet, approving nod with Mama Chinyere, who smiled broadly as she poured a fresh cup of sugarcane juice for her former rival.

EPILOGUE

The Legacy beneath the Shade Trees

Months had passed since the new mahogany bridge was laid across the stream. The rainy season had come and gone, bringing heavy downpours that swelled the river and tested every joint of the timber frame. But the bridge held firm, anchored deeply into the reinforced stone embankments.

It was early morning, and the familiar shade trees cast long, soft shadows across the crossing. The path was already alive with activity: market women carrying woven baskets of produce crossed without hesitation, while young children ran back and forth, their laughter echoing over the water.

Alh. Moussa walked slowly down the incline, taking his place on the shaded bench near the embankment. In his lap rested a newly carved wooden ledger—a community record book for maintenance, signed jointly by representatives from both households.

As he watched, Baba Garba walked up from the timber grove, stopping near the bridge support to inspect the wood after the night's light rain. From the opposite bank, Mama Chinyere approached with her young granddaughter, holding a fresh batch of homemade bean cakes and a cool flask of sugarcane juice to share under the trees.

The two former rivals greeted each other warmly, taking a moment to check the joints of the bridge together before sitting beside Alh. Moussa. The dispute that had once threatened to divide the settlement was now just a memory, replaced by a permanent system of shared duty, mutual respect, and lasting peace.

Alh. Moussa looked out over the stream, a peaceful smile settling on his face. The physical bridge over the water was strong, but the unseen bridge built between hearts was what would truly endure for generations to come.

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“A foundation laid in anger crumbles with the first rain.”

When a cart cracks the only bridge between two households, an old quarrel threatens to split a whole settlement. Under the shade trees, Alh. Moussa invites Baba Garba and Mama Chinyere to sit, listen and rebuild together.

A story for young readers and the adults who guide them, about patience, shared responsibility and the bridges we build between hearts.

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Wasa District, Abuja · 0803 317 5075 · Iff_abuja@yahoo.com