

DRAFT

A Goodwill Message by the Executive Secretary of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), Nigeria, Arc. Sonny Echono at the 8th Annual Conference/Summit for the Drafting of a Five-Year Strategic Plan of the Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU) Held at the Association of African Universities (AAU) Secretariat, Accra, Ghana from 12th - 15th July, 2022

Protocols...

Introduction

It is no more news that the *Ilorin Declaration* of January 2011 that gave birth to the Association of West African Universities (*AWAU*) was made at a meeting of Vice Chancellors and other principal officers of Universities from the West African sub-region that met in Ilorin with a view towards actualising observed goals of initiating collaboration among Universities; enhancing higher education as well as enhancing the improvement of infrastructure so as to improve manpower development across its member Universities in the entire sub-region. In addition to the above stated goals, 'the Association is expected to be of critical relevance in the provision of qualitative higher education that could guaranty employability and also complement the achievement of the goals of the Association of African Universities (*AAU*).

This is indeed, a tall and highly pertinent goal 'in view of the renewed as well as the increasingly important recognition that tertiary education has acquired over the years as a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy. No doubt, tertiary education has attained a very significant status like never before with respect to quality vis-à-vis the raising of higher-level employment skills for the purpose(s) of sustaining globally competitive research base and to improve knowledge dissemination for the overall benefit of the society'.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen of the academia, it may interest you to note that since the emergence of this noble association, series of conferences and meetings where robust presentations on different beneficial programmes and pedagogies with direct bearing on the advancement of tertiary education in most emerging economies of the region and Africa as a whole have been held.

Focus of the Summit

Permit me to therefore commence this “Goodwill Message” with a pertinent, quite apt and full of depth quotation from the 3rd Annual Conference of this great association delivered by Emeritus Professor Michael Omolewa in 2015 when he addressed the topic; “Turbulence in University Education – Roles of Universities in the Promotion of Good Governance, Democracy and Development in West-Africa”, a topic well-rooted in the foundational principles of the Association itself. He quoted the former South African President Thabo Mbeki as once pleading thus: “I would suggest that our entire continent remains at risk until the African University, in the context of a continental reawakening, regains its soul”. He added that, “the wave of change on the continent happily and hopefully provides another opportunity to the nations of Africa to move the vision and mission of universities to the next step” and thereby advancing the philosophical underpinnings of this foremost Association.

This, without any iota of doubt further underscores the critical place of tertiary education in the development of any economy and most importantly, the developing economies of most African countries and especially in this context, countries of the West African sub-region. According to a World Bank Group Report (2021), “higher Education is instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity. It benefits not just the individual, but the entire educational system”. The report also noted that, ‘Graduates of tertiary education are more environmentally conscious, have healthier habits, and have a higher level of civic participation. Also as a fall out of enhanced tertiary education system, tax revenues are increased, the number of healthier children are increased and there is a reduced family size, i.e. quality population which all help in building stronger nations. In short, tertiary education institutions prepare individuals not only by providing them with

adequate and relevant job skills, but also by preparing them to be active members of their communities and societies’.

To this end, this year’s annual conference and summit has been designed to address essentially, deliberations that are bordering around the drafting of a five (5) year Strategic Plan for the Association so as to enable an integrated approach and redirection of the focus of the Association’s programmes for an improved and enhanced economy.

Conclusion

In concluding this “message”, let me take us back again to the erudite presentation of our Emeritus Professor at the Association’s (*AWAU*) 3rd annual conference where he posited that, “possible way forward should be the restoration of the dignity, respect and confidence of the University to act as catalyst for the protection and promotion of democracy and good governance; and the empowerment of the University in West Africa to perform its traditional functions within the context of the emerging global world”.

Omolewa further added that, ‘the University should also empower the community, launch literacy initiatives to offer necessary literacy skills; thereby empowering the illiterate population who are at a disadvantage, and thus contribute to resolving the issue of rumour-mongering through ignorance and lack of access to information. Similarly, Universities should intensify research into indigenous knowledge and incorporate those basic principles of equity, communication, peace building and promotion of dialogue’.

At this juncture, let me acknowledge the invaluable efforts of all at this year’s annual conference while also calling for renewed synergy between the Association and other relevant as well as critical stakeholders within and outside the sub-region for the upliftment of tertiary education across the globe. Long live the Association of West African Universities, long live the Association of African Universities and long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Thank you and God bless.