

**Welcome Address by the Executive Secretary of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Arc Sunny S.T. Echono, at the Interaction with Heads of Institutions on the Disbursement Guidelines for Year 2024 Intervention Cycle, holding at the TETFund Auditorium on Tuesday October 31st, 2023.**

It is my distinct pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you, our esteemed heads of the various beneficiary institutions of the Fund at this strategic gathering. In the previous years, these interactions served as platforms mainly for the distribution of disbursement allocations. However, today we are gathered here to deliberate and receive your input into the Year 2024 disbursement guidelines. These engagements have now evolved into a veritable forum for performance evaluation and fostering cross fertilization of ideas between the Fund and the institutions it serves. It is indeed an opportunity for us to engage in dialogue, share insights, and foster discussions that seek to enhance the Fund's intervention programs across its intervention lines.

Reflecting on the events of the year 2023, you will recall that it is an impactful year that has witnessed series of programs such as the development of the TETFund ICT roadmap culminating in the deployment of the BIMS and launching of the TERAS platforms, the commencement of the designs and strategy for the innovation Hubs to selected beneficiary institutions, and the constitution of the committee for the establishment of two central research laboratories. Also, during the year, there were series of engagements such as the One-Day Stakeholder meeting held here in Abuja to address challenges associated with the Academic staff training and development programme. Others include, the TETFund Desk Officers' Workshops that took place across all the zones in the country, capacity building for ICT staff and students, and the interactive engagement with the Unions of beneficiary institutions. These initiatives and programs were aimed at strengthening the Fund's intervention programs and to help receive inputs that will guide the disbursement guidelines for the year 2024 intervention.

During the course of the year, we were able to address some of the identified issues promptly and committed to investigating those requiring more thorough examination. Notably amongst these issues are;

- 1) The astronomical increase in Forex necessitating our partial suspension of the foreign ASTD programme,
- 2) The problem of distressed projects for which an intervention line was provided in our Special Direct Disbursement and
- 3) The critique/review of our Research and innovation programmes for better national impact.

Distinguished participants and heads of institutions, it is worth noting that the year 2023, much like the preceding year, has been promising and has witnessed a substantial increase in our activities. We do not only hope to sustain and improve on these activities but also desire to expand them to include other areas of critical national interest and priorities in the Education Sector Road Map of the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration recently presented by the Hon. Minister of Education Prof. Tahir Mamman SAN.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) for their diligent efforts in collecting the education taxes. I am pleased to inform you that the collection of the Year 2023 Education tax, which we are allocating for the 2024 intervention projects is the highest collection to date. This no doubt is due to the increases approved by the former and present administrations to 3% of accessible profit and other factors diligently implemented by the FIRS in collaboration with the Fund. We sincerely hope and call upon the FIRS to sustain and improve the growth of the collection to enable us deliver on Mr. President's promise to the Nigerian people and the improvement of our tertiary education sector for greater competitiveness and national development.

We have dedicated time and resources to address various issues affecting our interventions as identified in last year's stakeholders meeting, and we have made significant progress in this regard. We

have also achieved substantial improvements in our interventions concerning research and innovation, academic staff training and development, as well as manuscript and book development in our institutions.

The proposed areas of focus under the 2024 Intervention programme include:

- a) A Significant increase in Annual Direct Disbursements in response to improvement in Tax collections
- b) Percentage Distribution of the Allocation
  - Direct Disbursement 90.54%
  - Designated 6.5%
  - Stabilization 2.94%Subject to final Distribution/Approvals.
- c) New interventions in the Annual Direct Disbursement are:
  - Career Centre/Unit to all categories of Beneficiary Institutions
  - Institution based skills development for Polytechnics.
- d) For the Special Direct Disbursement, we have
  - Increased the allocation and number of beneficiary institutions for the Special High Impact Programme (SHIP)
  - Provision of hostels using the Public Private Partnership arrangement for selected Beneficiary institutions.
- e) We have sustained the provisions for:
  - Disaster recovery
  - Security Infrastructure ; and
  - Completion of abandoned projects
- f) We have also sustained allocations for Research including
  - National Research Fund
  - Research and Innovation Fund
  - Up take of research findings to commercialization
  - Supervision of scholars Phd research.
- g) We have made provision for 4nos Central Multipurpose Laboratories and an additional provision for the 3nos Agricultural Laboratories/Farms initiated in 2023.

- h) We have sustained the implementation of the ICT roadmap with provision for converged services, subscription services for fixed cable /internet access and the TERAS initiative.
- i) There will be upgrade of Laboratories, Workshops and Equipment to Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (Technical) for the 2024 Intervention Year.
- j) There will also be the Early grade resource centers phase II to Colleges of Education (NCCE)
- k) Other areas of provision in the budget are:
  - Take-off grants as directed by the Federal Government
  - Higher Education book development programme
  - Providing for the Shortfall arising from fluctuations in foreign exchange in the ASTD Programme for our foreign scholars
  - Additional 6 nos Entrepreneurship innovation hubs to selected Polytechnics and COEs, and
  - National Skills development programme for polytechnics and Colleges of Education (Technical).

As earlier stated, The Hon Minister of Education only recently launched the TERAS platform, which will enable the digitalization and transformation of our institutions into educational information hubs in accordance with global standards. We are making consideration to specialized beneficiary institutions such as the medical universities for fellowship sponsorship on their ASTD intervention, as well as the Police and military academics in areas of conference sponsorship for academic instructors. We are also considering the institutional based skills development intervention line for our Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (Technical) in line with the NBTE proposal and general desire of the Heads of our polytechnics and Colleges of Education (Technical) to enable them deepen their core areas of Mandate. These new lines of intervention were conceived in response to popular request by stakeholders.

We shall continue to deepen research, promote innovation and honing of skills, encourage the discovery and development of creative talents amongst our scholars and especially the students as

a major pillar of the renewed hope agenda of the present Administration.

As we constantly improve the turn-around time in processing your proposals, we expect a similar level of commitment in speedy access of intervention lines and prompt payment to your contractors for executed works. The current record with us, to put it bluntly, is pretty dismal with some institutions acquiring notoriety.

We have keyed into the emerging Government policy to prepare, encourage and gradually wean our tertiary institutions from total dependence on Government. One strategy we are promoting is to encourage partnerships with the private sector in providing some needed infrastructure along with facility management, starting with the students accommodation. Our institutions must brace-up to the challenges and bountiful opportunities that will come as Government ponders on the grant of autonomy, even on an incremental basis.

Permit me to also seize this opportunity to appeal to our external stakeholders, including the National Assembly, to minimize distractions as we mobilize, harness and efficiently deploy all hands to the plough in restoring our tertiary institutions to the enviable heights envisioned by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR in his recent charge to the Honourable Minister of Education, Prof. Tahir Mamman.

In conclusion, I call upon all heads of institutions present here to ensure the smooth and timely, implementation of the Year 2023 allocation before the commencement of the 2024 intervention cycle. I genuinely hope that our deliberations will be fruitful, interactive, and provide valuable insights for reflection as we develop the guidelines for our 2024 intervention Cycle.

Thank you and God Bless.