

‘Ensuring Synergy for Effective Implementation of TETFund’

Fund Interventions’ Being Text of Speech by the Executive Secretary of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund Arc Sonny S.T. Echono [FNIA] at the Strategic Interactive Session for Heads of TETFund Beneficiary Institutions.

It is with delight that I welcome you to this important meeting as I seize the opportunity to express my profound appreciation for the torrents of congratulatory messages, courtesy visits and goodwill pledges since my appointment was announced. One cannot over-emphasize the significance of this engagement and the purpose for which it was organized. The event is part of the series of engagements with stakeholders since I assumed office as the Executive Secretary of TETFund. The essence of the engagements is to build and create a harmonious working relationship with relevant stakeholders in order to reposition the Fund for optimum performance. As Heads of TETFund beneficiary institutions you play a strategic role in the delivery of the Fund’s mandate, hence the need for constructive interaction at this time to define the course or direction for the Fund and its operations under my leadership.

Distinguished Heads of Institutions, ladies, and gentlemen, as you are no doubt aware, it is the desire to develop the human capital to service the various sectors of the economy that is primarily responsible for government’s investment in the education of its citizens. And it was in fact due to the identified deficit and decay in the tertiary sub-sector, that the Tertiary Education Trust Fund was established; initially as Education Tax Fund in 1993 and later Tertiary Education Trust Fund in 2011. The Fund’s mandate is to utilize initially 2% and now 2.5% Education Tax charged on assessable profit of all companies registered in Nigeria to improve the conditions, and quality of the nation’s public tertiary institutions.

The broad areas of Interventions as approved by the Board of Trustees, are categorized into the Annual Direct Intervention, and the

Special Interventions which are usually at the discretion of the Board of Trustees or the directives of the Federal Government. In all cases, disbursements are based on the equality of states and of geo- political zones as enshrined in the enabling Act.

The Act also states that the “ the Minister shall, on recommendation of the Board of Trustees and subject to the approval by the President, make guidelines for disbursement of funds under this Act.” It is my pleasure to inform you, that in line with the provisions of the Act, we have received the approval of Mr. President, for the guidelines of the Year 2022 intervention budget for implementation. It is for this reason amongst others, that I have invited you, to this strategic engagement. The disbursement for the annual direct intervention in the Year 2022 approved guidelines are summarized as follows; **N642,848,138.00** to each University, **N396,780,086.00** to each Polytechnic and **N447,758,804.00** to each College of Education. The letters of allocation for the Annual Direct intervention shall be released to you at this meeting, while the allocations for special interventions will be released appropriately in due course.

Distinguished ladies, and gentlemen I had the privilege to be on the Board of the Fund as Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Education and therefore conversant with the operations and activities of the Fund. As I said in my speech when I took over as Executive Secretary of the Fund, I will build on the successes of my predecessors in the various areas of intervention and will continue to support all critical areas including research, innovation and entrepreneurship education.

The enormous task of repositioning the tertiary education sector for sustained relevance is a collective one and it requires that we work in harmony and synergy to achieve the desired national objective of meeting our human capital needs through a robust and high quality higher Education sector. This synergy, which is the aggregation of multiple resources that provide greater value, cooperation and

teamwork will require that we bring on board our collective experiences and expertise towards finding solutions to specific national problems and goals.

Upon assumption of office, I received briefings and presentations from all the departments of the Fund on the status of their various activities. This was to enable me assess the level of progress and to see if there are issues that needed to be addressed urgently. One of our primary areas of focus, is digital literacy and the development and deployment of information and communication technology (ICT), including ubiquitous broadband and data connectivity/access to our institutions to enhance our ICT capabilities. This informed my visit to the Minister of Communications and Digital Economy to discuss possibilities and collaboration on our interventions and other needs in our tertiary institutions.

Presently, the ICT department has embarked on several projects that include:

1. Dematerialization and Digitalization of Thesis Projects
2. Aggregation of electronic databases subscription project
3. Upgrade of internet infrastructure and bandwidth positioning project.
4. Capacity building on productivity skills, eLearning methodologies and other ICT set skills acquisition.

Management has further decided to remove the need to obtain internal audit clearance on submissions to access 2nd tranche payment, where there is a final tranche outstanding. Henceforth internal audit clearance will only be required before payment of final tranche. The decision is to eliminate bottlenecks and delays in the execution of the intervention projects. Another area of serious concern to the Fund, is the incidence of distressed or non-performing projects which is becoming rampant and disturbing. The Fund for example has about 7 nonperforming/distressed projects in University of Port Harcourt, 6 in Enugu State University, a total of 5 in University

of Nigeria Nsukka, 4 in Taraba State University, 8 in University of Calabar, 4 in Kaduna State University and 1 at Alvan Ikoku College of Education. This phenomenon becomes even more worrisome, when viewed alongside the problem of un-accessed funds. We are mindful of the intricate variables in project management and delivery as well as the constraints created by our own internal policies and are ensuring that we review our processes where required but will also demand from beneficiary institutions accountability and sanctions where needed. I will in the coming weeks be engaging beneficiary institutions who have these serious problems with the view of bringing the projects to speedy completion and use.

In line with the Funds paradigm shift to content based intervention and the resolution to deepen Research and Development the fund introduced the train the trainer capacity building of academics on research proposal writing and research grant management skills, which is expected to have trained a total of 1,761 academics by July 2022. It is believed that those that have gained the training will now begin to train other academics locally and as such the programme will be stepped down in Year 2022 and 2023 before close-out. We also propose to refocus the entrepreneurship intervention line for universities to meet best global practice of entrepreneurship development and training. The present focus on provision of entrepreneurship centers and procurement of facilities and equipment, will be refocused to incorporate soft skills and initiatives in producing entrepreneurs and innovators.

The TETFund Centers of Excellence have all been allocated funds but are yet to commence their proposed work plans despite the capacity building workshops that had been organized for the Heads and Directors of all the centers on the establishment, operations, and administration of the centers as well the 'Strategic Framework and Establishment Guideline' developed by TETFund for the centers, hence the need to take a critical look at the implementation plan for the centers.

Meanwhile, to give further impetus to our TETFund Scholarship for Academic Staff (TSAS), we recently signed an MOU with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and a consortium of nearly 40 Universities in Brazil to provide world-class, multi-disciplinary, tuition free masters and PhD degree programmes for our scholars. This will dramatically increase the contribution of the sector to national food security, science and technology driven innovation as well as entrepreneurship and employability of Nigerian graduates. A similar MOU is at negotiation stage with another institution in France that would be of immense benefit to our institutions and the nation.

The department of Monitoring and Evaluation is at present conducting an impact assessment on the relevance of the Science and Engineering equipment supplied by the Skill G to 73 benefitting institutions. We are therefore soliciting prompt response to the questionnaires sent out to the benefitting institutions to enable the Fund make adequate and proper plans in the future.

We are constantly reviewing and improving our systems and processes to deliver the kind of quality service that stakeholders expect from us. We shall also strengthen our zonal offices with accompanying delegations to render our response time and cost efficiency more responsive to the expectations of all stakeholders. These and many more reform programmes will be implemented in the coming months to achieve better delivery of our mandate at the Fund. I sincerely seek your contributions and partnership in taking our Tertiary Education to the desired heights of national relevance and global competitiveness.

Finally, I want to congratulate all the Heads of our Beneficiary institutions who are attending this meeting for the first time. I thank you all for your support, prayers and best wishes and to assure you of my willingness to work in concert with all stakeholders and actors to deliver on the mandate of my office. We will always welcome suggestions and inputs on matters of interest and our doors will remain open for constructive engagements. I urge you all to put in

your best in ensuring that you utilize the allocations made by TETFund to your respective institutions in a prompt, prudent and judicious manner.

Thank you and God Bless.