



WELCOME ADDRESS BY ARC. SONNY S. T. ECHONO, OON THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, TERTIARY EDUCATION TRUST FUND AT THE NATIONAL EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT WORKSHOP HELD AT ROCKVIEW HOTEL ROYALE, WUSE 2, ABUJA ON 4TH & 5TH OCTOBER, 2023

Protocol

I am delighted to warmly welcome you all to this vital workshop, organized to discuss the implementation of the recommendations from the Report of the National Employability Benchmarking Exercise submitted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

2. You will recall that IFC assisted the Fund to conduct the employability benchmarking assessment programme for some selected universities, reflecting representative sample across the country between September 2022 and January 2023. The objective of undertaking the assessment of practices and processes supporting employability in our higher institutions, was to identify sector trends and provide comparative institutional findings on employability situation on a system level, to provide a starting baseline to guide the development of specific interventions at both institutional and system level.

3. The IFC has deployed its Vitae Employability Tool through a programmatic sector level approach by engaging the institutions to develop a sector level language and data-driven understanding of employability. The stakeholders debriefing session held on 6th February 2023 on the early findings provided the opportunity for IFC to obtain inputs from key stakeholders, enriched the final Report with far-reaching recommendations submitted to the Fund in April 2023. The Final Report was forwarded to all our universities for necessary action.

4. The Report of the employability benchmarking exercise covers the five dimensions of employability viz: **relevance of learning, governance and strategy, employer engagement, career services/guidance, and alumni management**. It highlighted how student employability support at the universities aligns to good practices globally. The Report indicates that the aggregate average score of Nigerian benchmark institutions across the five dimensions of employability is 2.3 out of 4.0 which is just above the average of all institutions benchmarked globally (2.2). The Report which also covers the assessment of the institutions' Digital Learning Strategy shows that surveyed universities lagged behind global best practices in application of digital learning strategies, access to large multidisciplinary databases and digital course-reserves as well as the level of faculty digital skills. This obviously require deliberate action on the part of all stakeholders to address our peculiar challenges.

5. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as you are aware, Nigeria being a developing economy is faced with the challenges of high unemployment, particularly youth unemployment which is at an all-time high in the country. An increasing number of young Nigerian graduates from tertiary education institutions are being released into the labour market with a continuously shrinking absorptive capacity. The structure of the economy which is largely import dependent has further limited the ability of the country to generate commensurable jobs due to low level of industrialization, thereby aggravating the unemployment situation in Nigeria.

6. Thus, aligning our intervention activities to meet our changing needs, and strengthening our education delivery towards fostering an entrepreneurship culture are some of the best ways for unleashing the enormous youth potential, addressing unemployment as well as other societal problems, and growing the economy. It is our belief that strengthening entrepreneurship education and training are crucial in this regard.

7. As an Intervention Agency for tertiary education in Nigeria, TETFund is deliberately refocusing its intervention activities to support learning outcomes and employability of Nigerian tertiary education graduates. I am pleased to report that the Strategic and Operational Plan for refocusing TETFund entrepreneurship intervention for employability and innovation was approved by the Federal Ministry of Education in March 2023. Consequently, the requirements and

guidelines for accessing entrepreneurship development intervention of the Fund were revised in line with the approved Plan.

8. In addition, the Fund is in the process of establishing entrepreneurship and innovation hubs in our beneficiary institutions across the six geo-political zones of the country, to link them with industry with a view to enhance entrepreneurship development, innovation and employability in line with contemporary global best practices. These interventions would help promote the transformation of our beneficiary institutions into catalysts for knowledge creation and organizing the translation of knowledge into usable products and services for addressing societal problems.

9. All these efforts are geared towards facilitating the link between Research, Development, and Innovation with the processes of promoting and enhancing entrepreneurship development to ensure graduate employability for national development. The aim is to enable Nigerian tertiary institutions serve as catalysts for regional and national economic development by unlocking the knowledge potential to solve critical societal challenges.

10. The Implementation Support Workshop for which we are all gathered here today, marks the commencement of the second phase of the employability programmes, focusing on the implementation of the recommendations from the benchmarking exercise and capacity building in the five employability dimensions

which the IFC Vitae instrument examined. It is expected that the workshop will focus on:

- i. Establishing a common understanding of the sector based on the IFC global framework with actionable opportunities on the findings and recommendations from the benchmarking exercise;
- ii. Promoting the adoption of best practices and lessons learned from around the world in improving the processes and operations in tertiary level education institutions in Nigeria, and thus provide improved employability services nationally; and
- iii. Facilitating broader strategic conversations around employability that contextualizes the challenges across student journey from access to employability, with a focus on implementing quality frameworks which emphasizes key performance indicators, employability support services and stronger linkages with industry.

11. Distinguished Personalities, the quality of tertiary education and its contribution to national development remains the focus of TETFund's interventions and issues central to employability and job-readiness of tertiary institutions graduates are particularly significant. It is therefore not surprising that the Honourable Minister of Education, Prof. Tahir Mamman at his maiden briefing charged the Fund to focus on improving research infrastructure and entrepreneurship development to support employability for sustainable growth.

12. For our part, the Fund is committed to the implementation of the recommendations from the employability benchmarking exercise. We strongly believe that the implementation would ultimately improve graduate employment, and thus reduce high rate of unemployment in Nigeria.

13. In line with the recommendations, the Fund is also organizing a capacity building programme for Career Unit Staff of our universities. The programme is designed to empower the staff to develop capacity, and acquire the skills and knowledge to support students in developing capabilities to find and sustain meaningful employment. The programme would also equip career officers of the Institutions who do not currently have career services unit with the basic skills to set up the Unit.

14. Before I conclude, let me use this opportunity to once again, convey our sincere appreciation to IFC and Cognity Advisory for their unwavering support to the Fund and professionalism in conducting the exercise. Let me also extend our gratitude to the participating universities for your commitment towards the realization of the set objective.

15. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I sincerely welcome you all and deeply appreciate your kind attention.