

Welcome Address by the Executive Secretary of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund Arc Sonny S.T. Echono at the (Two-days) Interactive Session with the Unions of Beneficiary Institutions on 11th and 12th October 2023, at the TETFund Auditorium.

It is with delight that I welcome participants to this very significant interaction with the Unions of our beneficiary institutions, universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. I must specifically welcome the members and leadership of the various union bodies that were nominated to attend this interactive session. The presence of the leadership of these unions is highly appreciated. The interactive session was conceived as a proactive engagement against the backdrop of the prevailing challenges, and to sustain the steady growth and development of the tertiary education sub-sector, a key success factor is the need to consistently engage and challenge one another on how we can best improve the situation.

It is our fervent hope that this interactive session will provide an enabling environment for us to understand some of our challenges and difficulties in the delivery of quality education in our institutions and thereby make meaningful contribution to the successful execution of the objective of the Fund. As you all know our primary mandate is to rehabilitate, restore and consolidate Tertiary Education in Nigeria, using funding alongside project management.

The session is also expected to serve as a platform to discuss and mitigate incidences of industrial disputes in the tertiary education sector and look at ways to prevent and avoid their occurrences. Furthermore, the interactive session shall afford the opportunity to build and solidify cooperation and collaboration between the Fund, its beneficiary institutions and the Unions on matters that affect the growth and development of tertiary education in Nigeria. As stakeholders and partners, we intend to share with you all that we have done and continue to do.

Distinguish ladies and gentlemen you will all agree with me that education occupies an important place in the scheme of things not only in Nigeria but globally. Specifically, nations have relied on the tertiary education sub-sector for the development of the critical manpower needed in all sectors, for development and industrialization. The world is currently faced with several consequential challenges that include among others climate change and population explosion. It is universally accepted that tackling these challenges will remain elusive without significant investments in education. The primary responsibilities of our tertiary institution is the development of human capital through the advancement of knowledge, skills, and other competencies. Whereas the trend globally is tilting towards digital and innovative knowledge to tackle global challenges in accordance with the UN sustainable development goals, as a nation, we are still far from attaining this goal. The global community as reflected in the UN development goals 2030 has called

for unified efforts for the development and improvement in tertiary education. It is for similar purpose that the tertiary Education Trust Fund was established by the federal government of Nigeria.

There is absolutely no doubt that the unions play a significant role not only in the development of our tertiary institutions, but of the entire education sector and the country through their various activities and contributions. The unions, viewed in positive light remain empowerment groups and there would have been little or no effectiveness in the nation's educational system without these unions; ASUU, ASUP, COEASU and the non-teaching unions NASU, SSANU, NAAT etc. The unions accordingly remain stakeholders that should be encouraged. Several studies have shown that strong unions could lead to innovation while lecturer/teacher leadership and empowerment has been identified as a key factor for all unions. It is because we recognize the role the unions play in the development of education that we constantly engage them in our interactive activities. We believe that you have contributions to make to our activities and programmes.

It is also a fact that issues related to industrial strike affect the development of education in the country. Studies have shown a link between poor student performance and industrial strike by unions. The arguments generally are that the quality of teaching and learning will significantly improve when teaching and learning are uninterrupted. Furthermore, building world class institutions requires a consistent and regular academic calendar and this is often affected by industrial strikes. However, a closer look will also show that many industrial strikes by the unions were for the improvement in teaching and learning conditions for both staff and students. It is for these reasons that sessions like this are organized to deliberate and find common grounds on issues of mutual interest and benefits. There is the urgent need for all stakeholders to unify efforts to reposition our tertiary institutions for the challenges of the times.

The unions are indeed part of the history of the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund. In the 1980's the decay of all tiers of education in Nigeria became glaring. Facilities had almost collapsed; teachers and lecturers' morale were at its lowest. Enabling environment for conducive teaching and learning was absent. The administration of President, Ibrahim Babangida took measures to arrest the rot. In December 1990 the federal government constituted the Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria (the Gray Longe Commission) to review the post-independence Nigerian Higher Education system after Lord Ashby's Commission of 1959.

The Longe Commission recommended among others the funding of higher education through earmarked tax to be borne by companies operating in Nigeria. An implementation committee under the chairmanship of Professor Olu O. Akinkugbe was constituted to implement the Grey Longe's Commission report recommendations. Subsequently, an Agreement was signed between the Federal Government and ASUU on the 3rd of September 1992 on funding of universities. In January 1993, the Education Tax Act was

promulgated alongside other education related Decrees. The Education Tax Act of No7 of 1993 mandated the Fund to operate as an Intervention Fund to all levels of public education (Federal, State and Local). This mandate was faithfully discharged between 1999 to May 2011 when the Education Tax Act was repealed and replaced by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act, due to identified challenges in operating the Education Trust Fund.

These lapses and challenges include:

- The ETF was overburdened and overstretched and could only render palliative support to all levels of public educational institutions in Nigeria.
- Duplication of functions and mandate of other agencies set up after the ETF, such as Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG)
- The decay, rot, and dilapidation of facilities issues in the tertiary education sector persisted as funds are only thinly spread.

Consequently, in the Year 2011, the law establishing the Fund was amended by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Act No. 16 which refocused the intervention scope of the Fund to only Public Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education.

TETFund administers, manages, disburses, and monitors the judicious utilization of the now 3% Tertiary Education Tax paid by all registered companies operating in Nigeria. This tax is allocated on an annual basis to Public Universities, Public Polytechnics and Public Colleges of Education in the ratio of 2:1:1.

The Mandate of Fund include:

1. Provision of essential physical infrastructure for teaching and learning.
2. Provision of instructional materials and equipment.
3. Research Book Development and Journals Publication.
4. Academic Staff training and development.
5. Any other need which, in the opinion of the Board of Trustees, is critical and essential for the improvement of quality and maintenance of standards in higher educational institutions.

The Fund currently provides intervention in Two Hundred and Fifty three (253) public tertiary institutions in Nigeria which are 99 Universities, 79 Polytechnics and 75 Colleges of Education.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Fund has recorded laudable achievements under its various intervention lines since its establishment. These include various infrastructural projects across Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education that range from classrooms, theatres,

to halls and laboratories. The Fund has equally provided sponsorship to thousands of scholars and lecturers across tertiary institutions in Nigeria for academic staff training and development as well as conference/workshops attendance both locally and overseas. It has further equipped and sponsored the publication of books and manuscripts and provided grants to scholars and lecturers under both the NRF and IBR grants.

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure has been given special attention because of its decay and collapse across public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These projects cut across institutions in different parts of the country and over the years include construction of lecture theatres [192], hostels [112], molecular laboratories [15], senate buildings [13], college/faculty buildings [342], studio/workshop buildings [138] and are still counting. Tertiary institutions across the country are dotted with TETFund projects which bear the insignia of the Fund distinctly inscribed on each project. A total number of 5,649 projects have been completed and about 1,021 are currently ongoing.

Academic Staff Training and Development

The Fund, between 2011 and 2023 has sponsored well over 37,785 lecturers to local and overseas institutions for PhD and master's degree programmes across tertiary institutions. The Fund has also supported 100,375 Lecturers in Federal and State Colleges of Education under its teacher supervision program, and an estimated 71,106 academic and non-academic staff to foreign and local conferences between 2011 and year 2021.

Library Development

The Fund's Library intervention programs also recorded tremendous impact, including the conversion of academic manuscripts to books. Between year 2011 and 2023, the Fund succeeded in procuring over 2.8 million titles for use in libraries of public tertiary institutions across the nation. The Fund also between 2011 and 2023 procured 374,756 e-resources as part of efforts to build the capacity of academic staff and students, as well as to stimulate research and publication across public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Research and Development

Research has remained a special intervention line of the Fund since it was introduced in 2009. There is no doubt that research remains the most important aspect and instrument of advanced learning and innovation if society and humanity are to make any meaningful progress. The National Research Fund in 2011 was set up with ₦3 Billion as take-off seed grant. In 2015 another ₦1 Billion was added and in 2019 a 50% increase being ₦7.5 Billion for that year and ₦8.5 Billion for 2021 was further added. This remains the largest basket of research fund available to academics and other researchers in our nation today. This is in addition to the Institution Based Research grants, support for Academic Research Journals, development of Research and innovation Hubs and the proposed Central Research Laboratories amongst many other efforts at supporting research across public tertiary institutions.

Information Communication Technology.

Our efforts in expanding and deepening the use of ICT in our institutions is ongoing. It is imperative that we seriously commit to this effort if we must play in the global market of today's knowledge economy. We are implementing an ICT road map which is aimed at providing the needed ecosystem and platform for the convergence and sustenance of common services to our tertiary institutions. We are very hopeful that the desired impact and positive results will soon manifest in our tertiary institutions.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION.

Over the years, the Fund has developed and improved on its monitoring activities to achieve the desired goals. Indeed, this is one of the main responsibilities entrusted to the Board of Trustees of the Fund. I am persuaded, that this is one of the crucial aspects of our responsibility for which the unions are critical contributors. Your honest and undoubted candid opinions will help us reform and redefine our policies and programmes where needed. Your insight and constructive criticism will surely help us in the implementation of our projects to meet the expected impact in your institutions.

I believe that this interaction will bring up issues of concerns that will not only enable us address the areas of intervention in our institutions but also espouse gaps and shortcoming that have resulted in strikes and interruptions of academic sessions, with a view to mitigating them. I am convinced we can collectively change the narrative.

Once again, I welcome you to this important interactive session and sincerely hope that significant contributions will be made to the discussions so that we can have lessons to take home at the end of the day. We will continue to engage you and seek your counsel where and when necessary. We will also involve you in our activities that include the National Research Fund Committee and the Book Development Committees of the Fund that are due for reconstitutions. These are Committees that are steered by intellectuals and leading academics in the country.

I wish us fruitful deliberations as I thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you and God Bless.