

OPENING REMARK BY ARC. SONNY S. T. ECHONO, THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, TERTIARY EDUCATION TRUST FUND (TETFund) AT THE NIGERIA DAYS IN FRANCE EVENT HELD FROM 17TH TO 19TH APRIL, 2023

It is my pleasure to be part of the Nigerian delegation and “Nigeria Days in France” organized by the French Embassy and Campus France. I also want to commend you for organizing the event and particularly for inviting and supporting TETFund participation. The forum promises to provide great opportunity for Nigeria and Republic of France to strengthen our bilateral relations and deepen cooperation in the fields of higher education and research. This is a further testimony to the very cordial relationship that has existed over the years between our peoples.

Education plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of any country and the Nigerian Government considers education as a primary right of citizens. It serves as the foundation and building block for the realisation of human potentials, hence the education sector is being accorded special attention as an essential measure for the realization of our national aspirations.

Functional education which is widely considered to address socio-economic challenges, and sustainable development in any economy can only be achieved if the education system is properly positioned to continuously and dynamically develop the manpower and capacity for exponential growth. Moreover, higher education plays a critical role in the development process, from which knowledge-based innovations and products deliver higher values in the market. Beyond economic benefits, higher education also offers scope for cultural and community development.

As part of measures to revamp tertiary education in Nigeria and ensure sustainable funding support for the sector, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was set up in 2011 as an intervention agency to provide supplementary support to all levels of public tertiary institutions with the aim of supporting rehabilitation, restoration and consolidation of tertiary education in Nigeria.

The agency was a creation of necessity to mitigate the collapse of tertiary education system in Nigeria primarily due to a dearth of physical infrastructure and educational resources that can support smooth running of a functional tertiary educational system. The intervention role of the Fund has contributed immensely to the rescue of the failing tertiary education in Nigeria and has indeed become a model for other African countries to emulate. Some of these have established similar organizations in their countries having understudied the TETFund.

For over a decade of TETFund's existence, the development of massive physical infrastructure across the landscape of tertiary institutions in the country has impacted them positively. However, the faculty and content development component of the interventions is still a challenge, necessitating a strategic and systematic refocusing of the Fund's intervention activities with greater emphasis on the capacity of Nigerian academics and institutionalization of Research & Innovation. The Fund is therefore deepening its support to our tertiary institutions to analyze, harvest, patent and market their innovative research outputs that will elicit the buy-in of industry.

Nigeria, like many other d-eveloping Countries is faced with the problem of unemployment and other socio-economic challenges. In response to these challenges, the development of entrepreneurship skill is given some measure of priority. Accordingly, TETFund is supporting the refocusing of entrepreneurship education and training in our tertiary institutions to foster an entrepreneurship culture and support employability of graduates as one of the best ways to unleash the enormous youth potential, address the prevailing unemployment and grow the economy.

In this regard, the Fund is supporting our tertiary institutions, particularly the universities to explore and deepen their partnership and collaborative engagements with reputable institutions across the globe. Aside from producing graduates who should be able to make positive impact in the economy, tertiary institutions should also engage in problem-solving research, for innovation and to meet societal needs. TETFund is therefore promoting the adoption of a people-centric triple helix model involving partnership between government, academia and the private sector in research and development for the benefit of society.

The overarching goal of this renewed commitment is to ensure restoration of academic leadership and academic excellence, improvement in the global ranking of Nigeria's tertiary institutions, reversal and mitigation of the problematic brain drain syndrome, and exploration as well as attraction of global collaboration for beneficiary institutions, this is ultimately to support the transition of the country's laggard resource-based to knowledge-based economy.

At this event, therefore, we look forward to forging a strong collaboration, especially with France and French Higher Educational Institutions and government agencies such as Universities, Research Institutes, Campus France, and CNRS among others with a view to harnessing potentials for both Nigeria and France to fastrack development through cooperation, synergy and strategic partnership.

Thank you for your attention.