

**Welcome Address by the Executive Secretary at the One-Day Stakeholders' Engagement on Emerging Issues that Affect TETFund Intervention Programs Organized by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) at the Continental Hotel on 16th August 2023.**

I am delighted to welcome all of you to this One-Day Stakeholders' Engagement on Emerging Issues regarding the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Intervention Program. As the Executive Secretary of TETFund, I feel honored to stand before such an esteemed audience of stakeholders who play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of tertiary education in our nation.

The purpose of today's engagement is to foster open dialogue and collaboration among the Fund's key stakeholders. We understand the significance of your collective insights, ideas, and feedback in enhancing the effectiveness of our intervention programs. It is through our shared efforts that we can continue to drive positive changes and contribute to the development of our nation's education sector.

As an agency of the government tasked with rebuilding and supporting the nation's tertiary institutions, we are fully aware of the enormous responsibility and task before us, especially considering the importance of tertiary education in nation-building. The Fund has been entrusted with the responsibility of rehabilitating the physical infrastructure and other content aspects of the nation's entire public tertiary institutions. To fulfill this mission, various intervention lines of the Fund were established.

Over the years, the Fund has not only supported public tertiary institutions in the rehabilitation and provision of physical infrastructure but has also contributed to the training of academic staff in postgraduate studies both locally and internationally. It has also supported the development and conversion of manuscripts into books and invested in the libraries of these institutions with materials and other resources. Additionally, the Fund has provided support for conference attendance, research, and publications, significantly improving the standard and quality of teaching, and learning in our nation's tertiary institutions. Despite the progress achieved, much still needs to be done, and the Fund remains committed to continuously improving its services and operations through stakeholder engagement and other means.

Since assuming office as Executive Secretary, I have taken significant steps aimed at repositioning and advancing TETFund's objectives. Some noteworthy engagement activities under my leadership include the One-Day Interactive Engagement with Heads of Beneficiary Institutions. We initiated this session to gather valuable feedback on TETFund intervention projects. This input has been instrumental in refining our strategies and ensuring that our projects are tailored to meet the specific needs of beneficiary institutions.

The One-Day Interactive Session with Staff of the Fund was similarly organized. We recognize the importance of a motivated and skilled workforce. As such, we held a session with our staff to address issues related to career development and

staff welfare. This has resulted in a more dedicated and efficient team driving the Fund's activities.

A Workshop in Collaboration with the Bureau for Public Procurement was also organized at various zones for Heads of institutions and Directors of Procurement in institutions. The purpose was to familiarize them with the relevant procurement laws and processes, to ensure seamless project implementation across institutions. The BPP made presentations on the various aspects of their processes and how institutions were expected to proceed at each stage and what was required to proceed at every stage. The workshop was indeed an eye-opener to many of the institutions that were ignorant of the procedures of the Bureau. It is expected the workshop will help ensure the smooth implementation of projects across institutions and further enhance the transparency and accountability of our operations.

The Audit Process witnessed a systematic review under my leadership. We took proactive steps to address issues related to distressed projects across institutions. By revisiting our audit process and implementing a robust Monitoring & Evaluation policy, we have been able to achieve smoother and faster execution of physical infrastructure interventions. Thanks to the reviewed audit process and the implementation of the Monitoring & Evaluation policy, our physical infrastructure interventions are progressing smoothly and efficiently. Issues related to variation of projects have constantly featured in my engagements with institutions. The rate of inflation in the country has made it necessary that we consider the issue of variation depending on the project lifecycle. Projects with more than one year lifecycle are likely to be affected by inflation and rise in cost of materials, as such variation in such cases may be justifiable. The Fund is further considering either converting the Fabrication interventions line to Skills acquisition or introducing skill acquisition alongside the fabrication programme. There is also the need to take an audit of all equipment, particularly the skill G equipment, there is the need to establish their status and identify those that require upgrade, it will enable the Fund to avoid their duplication in our various institutions.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to review some of our achievements and challenges. While it is evident that we have recorded tremendous successes in the delivery of our mandate, we also face several challenges. The Fund, for instance, has successfully sponsored over 37,000 scholars for both foreign and local PhDs, Masters, Bench Work, and Postdoc programs in various institutions. Recently, we encountered difficulties that led to the suspension of foreign scholarships. This suspension was a result of the CBN's monetary policy, which caused fluctuations in the value of the Naira. Consequently, the Fund is experiencing difficulties in the payment of foreign scholarship tuition fees and stipends. As a solution, we are considering suspending the foreign component of the TETFund scholarship until the stability of the Naira is restored, while considering and upward review of the local TSAS

intervention. The Fund at this material time is discouraging the institutions from the Benchmark programmes.

Additionally, there are issues related to scholars not returning to serve their bonds at their home institutions upon completion and return. Furthermore, issues related to scholars absconding have complicated the TETFund Scholarship for Academic Staff (TSAS) program. It is for these and other reasons that this engagement was organized. We need to address these challenges and find solutions to ensure the effective and smooth implementation of our scholarship programs. The Fund has recently signed several MoU's with some prestigious institutions overseas that include universities in Malaysia, India, Brazil and the United States with a view to boosting and enhancing the TSAS programme in the future.

You will also recall that to enhance the effectiveness of the National Research Fund (NRF), a National Research Fund Screening and Monitoring Committee (NRFS&MC) was established to screen and select proposals from across institutions and researchers for funding. The Committee comprises senior academic staff of universities and other tertiary institutions across the country. Members are appointed for an initial period of two years that is renewable; however, no member is allowed to serve for more than 4 years, which is equivalent to two terms.

Similarly, to ensure the successful implementation of the Higher Educational Book Development Project, the Board of Trustees of the Fund set up the standing Technical Advisory Group [TAG] committee in 2009. The mandate of this committee includes working collaboratively with the Fund to fine-tune the Book Development Blueprint Document into a Strategic working document that clearly spells out the administrative procedures, framework, and guidelines for effective TETFund Higher Education Book Development Intervention Funds in Institutions within the nation. The committee is also responsible for reviewing the document when necessary. The TETFund Book Development Fund intervenes in three key areas: publication of academic books and the conversion of high-quality theses into books, support for professional Association Journals, and the establishment and sustainability of academic Publishing centers.

It is worthy to note that the standing Technical Advisory Group (TAG) requires reconstitution just as the National Research Fund Screening and Monitoring Committee, as some members have served for four years. We recognize the importance of fresh perspectives and expertise to drive our educational support initiatives effectively. Furthermore, we aim to establish a robust selection criterion based on established standards for both the National Research Fund Screening and Monitoring Committee (NRFS&MC) and Research and Development Standing Committee (RDSC). The mandate of both committees will also be subject to careful review. Additionally, we propose a review of the National Research and Development Fund Standing Committee's composition, reducing its membership from 165 to 50. The Fund is also considering a holistic evaluation of the Research and Development activities such as the NRF, IBR,

innova8 program, etc. This gathering will also discuss the recent focus of the Fund on Skills acquisition program. The Fund is working towards the establishment of 2 central multi-purpose laboratories in the country and 6 innovation hubs across the six zones in the country. This platform is indeed open to all conversations centered around the activities or issues that affect TETFund interventions across tertiary institutions in the country.

My dear distinguished participants, in line with our commitment to continuously strengthen our intervention activities and enhance their effectiveness in supporting employability practices, we are delighted to share the outcomes of the National Employability Benchmarking Assessment Programme conducted for selected universities across the country. This assessment was made possible with the invaluable support of the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The primary objective of this exercise was to identify sector trends and provide comparative institutional findings on the employability situation at a systemic level. The aim is to establish a starting baseline that will guide the development of specific interventions, both at institutional and system levels. We held a stakeholder's debriefing session on 6th February 2023, during which the IFC presented the early findings from the exercise. Subsequently, after successfully completing the program, the IFC submitted the final report in May 2023, which has been shared with the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), the National Universities Commission (NUC), and all the beneficiary universities.

As we move forward, we are committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in the IFC report and findings from the exercise. To this end, we propose organizing an Implementation Support Workshop on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in employability. The workshop aims to lay a strong foundation and chart a clear direction for practical solutions to the challenges identified in the IFC report that hinder the employability of Nigerian graduates.

The Implementation Support Workshop on KPIs in employability will be facilitated by employability experts from the IFC, alongside local experts in Nigeria. We aim to gather representatives from the beneficiary universities, NUC, FME, and the Fund for this interactive session. During the workshop, we will address the challenges and recommendations pertaining to poor career services, tracking, and documenting employability KPIs, and the lack of robust academia-industry linkages. Additionally, we recognize the importance of empowering the staff of Career Units in Nigerian Universities. Therefore, we have designed a Capacity Building program specifically for these staff members. This program will equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to support students in developing capabilities to find and sustain meaningful employment. The train-the-trainer (TTT) model will be adopted, where three (3) participants from each beneficiary university will receive training from the IFC experts on the details of setting up or restructuring career services units to meet global standards. These trained participants will then pass on their knowledge to other staff members of career support units at their respective universities.

We believe that these initiatives will contribute significantly to the improvement of employability practices in Nigeria and pave the way for a brighter future for our graduates. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) for their unwavering support throughout this journey. Together, we can create a stronger and more prosperous future for our graduates and the nation.

In our efforts to promote computer and information technology in institutions across the country, the Fund has commenced the full implementation of the LDI online submissions platform. Henceforth the submission of proposals for the physical infrastructure projects by institutions will be carried out online. The provision of fixed mobile internet services to staff and students of various institutions programme will also be fully implemented. The Fund is also implementing the converged services programme which includes capacity development and train the trainer [TTT] on communication skills and online certification courses for students across institutions. The capacity-building programme and training-the-trainer and technical works for blackboard enhanced e-learning platform will be implemented. The phase two of the thesis digitization project will also be fully implemented.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I would not like to take the time of our resource persons, and most sincerely wish to express my gratitude for your presence at this Stakeholders' Engagement on Emerging Issues concerning TETFund Intervention Programs. Your input and collaboration are essential in shaping the future of tertiary education in our nation. Together, we can overcome all challenges and build a stronger and more competitive education sector. I assure you that as the Executive Secretary, I remain committed to driving positive changes, professionalism, and efficiency in achieving our mandate. I wish us fruitful deliberations.

Thank you, and God Bless.