

**TEXT OF A WORLD PRESS CONFERENCE BY SIR JOSEPH N. ARI, KSM,
DIRECTOR GENERAL/ CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE INDUSTRIAL
TRAINING FUND (ITF) ON TUESDAY, 14TH AUGUST, 2018 AT KOGI
HALL, TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA.**

PROTOCOL

I am very delighted to welcome the cream of the Fourth Estate of the Realm to this World Press Conference. I am always excited when an opportunity presents for me to interact with members of the press both in my official capacity and on a personal level. In my current position as the Director General of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), interactions with the media such as we are holding today provide an opportunity for me to bring our stakeholders abreast of our activities and programmes, using the media's powerful tool for information dissemination.

My joy also stems from the fact that the media has played a vital role in driving the Organization to what it is today. You will recall that one of the key mandates of the ITF has been the enshrinement of training consciousness in Nigerians. That today, employers of labour will train their employees without compulsion is an indication that we have largely achieved this aspect of our mandate. This could not have been possible without the consistent sensitization of Nigerians by the media. On behalf of the Governing Council, Management and entire staff of the ITF, I want to thank you for being such a pillar of support.

However, beyond its contributions to the development of the Industrial Training Fund, I consider the media as my primary constituency having risen through its ranks to the very pinnacle of both the print and electronic arms of the journalism profession. Therefore, it will not be farfetched if I should assert that my experience in the media prepared me and provided the necessary moulding for what I am today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me at this juncture to introduce the Industrial Training Fund. The ITF, as you may be aware, is the foremost human capacity development agency in Nigeria. It was established on 8th October, 1971 and vested with the mandate to:

- Provide, promote and encourage the acquisition of skills in industry and commerce with a view to generating a pool of indigenous trained manpower sufficient to meet the needs of the private and public sectors of the economy.
- Provide training for skills in management for technical and entrepreneurial development in the public and private sectors of the economy.
- Set training standards in all sectors of the economy and monitor adherence; and,
- Evaluate and certify vocational skills acquired by apprentices, craftsmen and technicians in collaboration with relevant organizations.

Throughout its years of existence, it has pursued this mandate with single mindedness and vigor, training over 20 million Nigerians whose contributions to the growth of the various sectors of the national economy cannot be easily quantified.

On assumption of the incumbent management in September 2016, coming about a year after the inauguration of President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, there was the urgent need to reposition the Fund and recalibrate our activities to address the policy goals of the Federal Government on job creation, poverty reduction, economic diversification and Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). Management recognized that all these required significant HRD interventions for their success.

In addition, surveys and estimates by various institutions revealed that despite Government's best efforts, unemployment was still on the rise. Other projections suggested that the country's population was expected to hit the 500 million mark by 2050, making it the third most populous country on earth. Much as accelerated population growth could be an advantage, it becomes a huge disadvantage and a severe dead weight where this population is neither employed nor equipped with the requisite skills for sustenance. And if the current unemployment rate is responsible for the high incidences of violence, criminality and other social vices that are rampant today, it would be safe to conclude that such incidences will conceivably

escalate exponentially, if deliberate actions to equip Nigerians with competitive skills for job creation and growth are not taken.

In the face of this bleak outlook and in line with our mandate, the Fund accordingly unveiled one of its most ambitious plans since establishment. Tagged the **ITF Reviewed Vision: Strategies for Mandate Actualization**, the six-year plan was divided into Quick wins, medium and long-term goals. The implementation of the plan, which commenced in late 2016 will terminate in 2022. The key objectives of the plan was to accelerate the impartation of technical vocational skills to Nigerians, aggressively address service challenges, tackle infrastructural deficits, expand revenue generation and a gamut of other strictures impinging the actualization of the Fund's mandate.

About two years into its implementation, I am pleased to say that, it has almost exceeded expectation by training over 150,000 Nigerians, who are today earning sustainable livelihoods as paid employees, or as entrepreneurs that are employing others. To achieve this, we expanded existing skills acquisition programmes and introduced new initiatives. These programmes include the National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP), the Women Skills Empowerment Programme (WOSEP), Passion to Profession Programme (P2PP), the Skills Training Empowerment Programme for the Physically Challenged (STEPP-C) and the Construction Skills Empowerment Programme (CONSEP) among several others.

The NISDP, which is our flagship technical vocational skills acquisition programme, was run twice in the 36 states of the Federation and the FCT in 2017.

In order to ensure that all the objectives of the NISDP were achieved, new ideas were introduced. For instance, trade areas were streamlined from over 10 to three namely: Welding and Fabrication, Tailoring and Fashion Designing and Plumbing and Pipefitting. In addition, unlike in the past where the ITF depended on State Governments to assist trainees with start-up kits, all the beneficiaries of the programme were provided with start-up kits by the Fund. The essence was to ensure that they started their businesses upon

graduation. The decision to provide start-up packs was based on results of our tracer studies of earlier phases, which revealed that in all cases where the trainees were provided with the kits, over 90 percent earned reasonable livelihood as entrepreneurs.

Similar results were recorded in the other programmes that were implemented. Under the Women Skills Empowerment Programme (WOSEP), which is a skills acquisition programme targeted at the women folk, over 500 rural women drawn from 13 states and the FCT were trained in 32 centres in 11 trades and crafts including: Events management, cosmetology, poultry farming, bead making, baking and pastry, soap/disinfectant/detergent making, hair making, food processing, tailoring and fashion design, tie and dye, and electrical installation. Like in the case of the NISDP, all the beneficiaries were equally equipped with start-up kits at the end of the programme.

In further efforts to build the capacity of Nigerians in the construction sector, the Fund introduced the Construction Skills Empowerment Programme (CONSEP). The programme was informed by our studies and the results of similar studies by other organizations, which showed that although vacancies existed in this sector, they were being filled by persons other than Nigerians, because of the lack of requisite skills. Equally significant were the incidences of building collapse, which were directly linked to the absence of the necessary capacity of the construction artisans. To this end, a total of 1,900 Nigerians from 19 states of the Federation and the FCT were trained over a 3-month period in five trade areas namely: Brick making, plaster of Paris, tiling, electrical installation and carpentry. It is our firm belief that equipping Nigerians with these skills will go a long way in stemming incidences of building collapse and supplanting the multitude of foreigners in this sector.

In addition, the ITF is implementing the Technical Skills Development Project (TSDP) in collaboration with the Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NECA), the umbrella body of employers of labour in Nigeria. From 10 Participating Organizations (POs) in early 2016, the Project has today been extended to 24 more participating organisations. The trades and crafts have

similarly been increased as a result of the growing popularity of the programme, as most of its graduands are employed as soon as they graduate.

Amidst all these activities, the ITF in conjunction with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), conducted a National Skills Gap Assessment in Six Priority Sectors of the Nigerian Economy namely: Agri-business and agro-allied, Metal & solid minerals, Oil and gas related industry, Construction, Light manufacturing and Services industry. The report is available on the ITF website at www.itf.gov.ng.

Several disturbing facts emerged in the survey, the report of which was presented to stakeholders in Abuja in April this year. The report indicated that despite spiraling unemployment, 925 trades were either difficult or hard to fill in the country's labour market. The breakdown showed that 19.7% vacancies were in the housing sector, 13.9% in petro-chemical sector, 14.7% in other goods, 11.4% in the auto industry, 10.3% in textiles, 10.1% in steel, 8.9% in the services sector and 3.3% in the leather industry. The report also noted that 15.7 % of all hard to fill vacancies were due to lack of technical skills, 11.8% due to lack of basic IT skills, 9.2% due to lack of advanced IT skills and between 9.2% and 7.5% of the vacancies were due to the lack of requisite soft skills.

The findings of the report further corroborated our in-house skills gaps surveys, which equally showed that despite rising unemployment, numerous vacancies still existed in several sectors of the National economy that either could not be filled by Nigerians because of the absence of the requisite skills or were being filled by foreigners.

In order to address this paradox, stem spiraling unemployment and drive President Muhammadu Buhari's job creation efforts, management came up with a list of implementable programmes for year 2018. The programmes are as follows:

- National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP)
- Women Skills Empowerment Programme (WOSEP)
- Air-conditioning and Refrigeration (Training on Wheels)

- Designing and Garment Making (Training on Wheels) for Nigerian youths
- Skills Training and Empowerment Programme for the Physically Challenged (STEPP-C)
- Post-Harvest Techniques and Project Development
- Aqua-culture/Fish Farming
- Manure Production
- Crop Production/Greenhouse Technology
- Poultry farming
- Training Programme Development on International Marketing.

In all, the programmes will train about 13,000 Nigerians in the 5-month period. The breakdown of Nigerians to be trained is as follows;

- 11,100 youths to be trained under the NISDP
- 360 women under Women Skills Empowerment Programme.
- 75 youths in Air-conditioning and Refrigeration (Training on Wheels).
- 50 youths in Designing and Garment Making (Training on Wheels).
- 120 to be trained under the Skills Training and Empowerment Programme for the Physically Challenged People (STEPP-C).
- 150 persons to be trained under the Post-Harvest Techniques and Project Development programme.
- 150 persons to be trained in Aqua-Culture /Fish Farming
- 150 persons to be trained in Manure Production
- 150 persons to be trained in Crop Production
- 150 persons in Poultry Farming.

Apart from the NISDP that will be implemented in all states of the Federation including the FCT, Abuja, the rest of the programmes will be shared amongst the states. What this means is that whereas some of the states will benefit from one of the programmes, others could benefit from two or even three of the programmes. The decision as to which state benefits from a particular programme, was based on the likelihood of participants to eke out sustainable livelihoods, because of the needs of the states for such particular skills.

Preliminary activities for the implementation of the programme including procurement of crested T-shirts and face caps, screening of participants and selection of training centres have been concluded, preparatory for the take-off Technical and Vocational skills training programmes scheduled as follows:

- National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP)- August, 2018
- Women Skills Empowerment Programme (WOSEP) – already commenced.
- Air-conditioning and Refrigeration (Training on Wheels) August, 2018
- Designing and Garment Making (Training on Wheels) for Nigerian youths, September, 2018
- Skills Training and Empowerment Programme for the Physically Challenged (STEPP-C) August, 2018

The Entrepreneurship Development Training component of the above programmes will be conducted between September and October, 2018.

The agro-allied trades namely: Post-harvest techniques, aqua-culture/fish farming, manure production, crop production/greenhouse technology and poultry farming will hold from 3rd September, 2018.

Ladies and gentlemen, with the number of Nigerians that are currently unemployed, the number of trainees we are commencing with, which is over 13,000 is like a drop of water in the ocean especially when weighed against the fact that training a country is more than training a company. It is in this regard that we seize this opportunity to call on state governments and other stakeholders to sponsor additional trainees. Such sponsorship will entail payment of monthly stipends to the trainees, payment of master craftsmen allowance and provision of start-up kits to trainees.

I wish to emphasize that tackling unemployment through skills acquisition cannot and should not be the responsibility of the ITF and other agencies of the Federal Government alone. The co-operation and collaboration of all State Governments, the Organized Private Sector (OPS), politicians and other stakeholders will be critical for a multiplier effect. Our doors are therefore

wide open for collaboration in any aspect of human capacity development and vocational and technical skills training.

The collaboration of the media is equally vital. As the most important vehicle for information dissemination, agenda setting and opinion moulding, it is your responsibility to sensitize Nigerians on the importance of the acquisition of technical skills. It is equally your responsibility to ensure that Governments at all levels appreciate the critical place of skills acquisition in not just tackling unemployment but also developing their societies as a whole.

It is vital that Nigerians appreciate that the Federal Government and its agencies cannot provide jobs for all Nigerians. Indeed, no country whether developed or developing has ever achieved that. Instead, the resort has been to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), which is today described as the currency of the 21st century. It is the only sure way to gainfully engage as many Nigerians as possible. However, for this to happen, the current perception of skills acquisition as a preserve for the never-dowells, the poor and the wretched in our society must change. As journalists, you are in a vantage position to ensure this change. If you successfully change the perception of Nigerians about technical skills, the problem of unemployment and other development issues would have been half-tackled.

I want to thank you for honouring our invitation and do hope that you will use the immense instruments available to you for the cause of the development of our great nation through accelerated skills acquisition.

Thank you for listening and may God bless Nigeria.