

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING FUND (ITF), SIR JOSEPH N. ARI, KSM, KSS, DURING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE FUND ON FRIDAY, 8TH OCTOBER, 2021, AT THE HEADQUARTERS' AUDITORIUM AND GYMNASIUM COMPLEX, JOS.

I feel deeply honoured and truly privileged to address you today on one of the most important dates in the history of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) - the occasion of the celebration of the Fund's Golden Jubilee.

I thank God Almighty for our longevity as a corporate entity and His grace in our lives that has ensured that we are alive and healthy to witness this historic event. It is my prayer that He continues to sustain us as an institution and as individuals in order that we effectively discharge the enormous task of developing the Nation's human resource vested on us.

Before I proceed with my speech and on a very sad note, last Friday, we lost one of our closest partners, the Director-General/Chief Executive of the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), Dr. Timothy Olawale, who coincidentally was supposed to deliver a paper here today. Therefore, may we all rise and observe a minute silence. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace amen.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on an occasion as momentous and auspicious as this, it will be imperative for us to go down memory lane, to remind ourselves of

where we started, how far we have come and the responsibility before us going forward.

As you may be aware, it was on a Friday, just as today, 50 years ago, precisely on the 8th of October 1971, that the administration of General Yakubu Gowon (rtd) officially signed into law the Decree establishing our great institution. The decision to establish the Fund by the Federal Government was informed by the fact that 10 years after the euphoria of independence in 1960, our dear country was still grappling with the twin problems of replacing the departing colonial manpower with qualified Nigerians as well as growing the industrial base of the new Nation. As part of measures to address these, the Federal Government established a number of Agencies whose mandates were specifically targeted at achieving these goals. One of these Agencies was the ITF, which was charged with, amongst others, the mandate to provide a pool of qualified Nigerians that will man the key sectors of the nascent economy.

Today, 50 years later, that we are here celebrating this landmark is tribute to our commitment, resilience and dedication as an organisation and its workforce, as we have had to overcome numerous hamstrings and debilitating challenges that stood on our path while also contributing significantly to the goals and objectives of the Federal Government, even as other institutions with supposedly greater potential and more robust mandates have either gone under or are floundering and flailing.

Our longevity and effectiveness could be attributed, in the main, to the quality of leadership and workforce the Fund has had all these years. In terms of leadership, the Fund, since 1971 has had at the

helm, seasoned technocrats, acclaimed academics and versatile administrators with clear visions and commitment to ensuring the full achievement of its mandate. These patriots are: **Dr. Abel Ubeku, Mrs Nene Archibong, Alh. Mohammed Dikko, Alh. Lawal Tudun Wada, Alh. Hassan Ahmed II, mni, Prof. Olu Emenifo Akerejola, Prof. Longmas Sambo Wapmuk, OON and Dr. Juliet Chukkas-Onaeko, MFR.** These visionaries, patriotic and dedicated Nigerians left indelible footprints and legacies that have ensured that the organisation has not merely survived but continually remained relevant to the achievement of national policy goals and objectives.

For instance, foremost Technocrat and Industrialist, Dr. Ubeku laid the foundation of the Fund when he was appointed as the first Chief Executive of the ITF in 1971. Mrs. Archibong, who was the second Chief Executive and the first female to head the Fund, developed the first ITF Training Policy and its human capital. It was also under her administration that the Fund implemented its first training programme.

The third Chief Executive of the ITF, Alh. Dikko relocated the Fund's Headquarters from Lagos to its present location in Jos and created additional Area Offices. Alh. Tudun Wada, who succeeded Alh. Dikko, created new Departments following the upgrading of the Fund from a grade 'B' parastatal to a grade 'A' parastatal and established new Area Offices as well as introduced the ITF National Training Conference. Alh. Hassan Ahmed II, who was the first former staff of the Fund to be appointed as the Chief Executive, embarked on accelerated staff development, constructed and commissioned the ITF Headquarters Complex, and other

infrastructural projects. Under Prof. Akerejola, the ITF witnessed enhanced staff welfare and the computerisation of its activities. Professor Wapmuk's administration oversaw the refocusing of the Fund's service offerings from soft to hard skills, the establishment of the ITF Model Skills Training Centre (MSTC), Abuja, and the accelerated capacity development of the Fund's workforce. Albeit short-lived, the administration of Dr. Chukkas-Onaeko commenced the automation of the Fund's activities and improved staff welfare and salary structure.

Although, these are mere highlights of the tenures and achievements of these patriots, it is not far-fetched to say that the successes recorded by the ITF today owe to the solid foundation provided by these great people. At the centre of these successes were a core of hardworking and professional workforce that provided the Chief Executives with the necessary followership that is a critical ingredient for all successful institutions.

Therefore, when the incumbent administration came into office in 2016, we inherited a system that was well structured and firmly positioned to meet Government and other stakeholders' expectations. The immediate challenge of the new administration was matching the achievements of our forebears and even surpassing them especially as the economy was in recession, unemployment was high, and poverty was rising. In light of these problems, we were expected to drive the achievement of Government policies including economic diversification, poverty alleviation and job creation that were initiated by the Federal Government as ways of ameliorating these challenges. Against this backdrop therefore, the incumbent administration unveiled the first

phase of the **ITF Reviewed Vision: Strategies for Mandate Actualisation**, which was considered by many as the most ambitious plan by the ITF since establishment. Under the plan, new skills intervention programmes were introduced while existing programmes were expanded, leading to the training of over 500,000 Nigerians with cutting-edge technical skills in 4 years. The beneficiaries were all empowered with start-up packs for the first time since the establishment of the Fund. Similar strides have been recorded in infrastructural development, direct training services, collaborations and other facets of the Fund's activities.

In light of the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund launched the second phase of the **Reviewed Vision**, which sought to consolidate on the achievements of the first phase and address the numerous challenges faced by our clients as a result of the pandemic. One key achievement of the plan that will terminate in 2024 is the assembling of the ITF mobile phone which was produced by the Model Skills Training Centre, Abuja. Already, plans are underway for the mass production of the mobile phone, which was presented to President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, in June this year. The Fund also accelerated the implementation of its skills intervention programmes and other service offerings that were specially targeted at addressing the immediate needs of our numerous clients. Also, due to the pandemic, the Fund accelerated the process of automating its business processes in order to enhance efficiency and reduce person-to-person contact. To this end, the SIWES online platform has been created while the enabling equipment for e-learning have been procured and deployed for remote implementation of our programmes.

Your Excellencies, without fear of accusations of self-adulation and self-glorification, it is obvious that the Industrial Training Fund has done remarkably well in 50 years of its existence. However, a quick scan of the national economy will reveal that despite our many successes, we have huge challenges ahead of us in the next phase of our life as an institution. The problem of unemployment remains as intractable as ever despite the multifaceted efforts of Government. Recent surveys including one conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicates that rather than fall, the number of Nigerians that are unemployed, particularly the youth, has continued to soar. According to the NBS, unemployment rate rose from 27.1% in Q2, 2020 to 33.3% in Q4, 2020. Similarly, like unemployment, the problem of poverty has also not been fully tackled as it has witnessed a marginal rise as 40% or 83 million Nigerians currently live in poverty, a figure that is projected to increase to 90 million or 45% by 2022. If these are not contained, our population which is projected to hit the 400 million mark by 2050 according to Rotary Action Group for Reproductive Maternal and Child Health (RMCH), will become a real albatross if concrete efforts are not invested in tackling these blights.

This grim scenario makes the theme of this celebration: **Changing the Poverty Narrative Through Skills: The Role of the ITF and the Imperative for Institutional Synergy** relevant and germane, and will provide our invited speaker, Mr Ezekiel Gomos, to bring to bear his extensive experience in the public and private sectors, and his indepth understanding of our organisation, its operations and activities, and how best it can be applied to tackling

the twin challenges of poverty and unemployment in synergy with other organisations.

Ladies and gentlemen, it must be noted that throughout our history, the Fund has been reputed for its proactiveness and far-sightedness, which more than anything else, account for our longevity and relevance and our ability to successfully negotiate all the obstacles to the full actualisation of our mandate. Following from this illustrious tradition, and taking into cognisance the enormous problems confronting the Nation, the incumbent Management came up with several focus areas that will guide our operations including escalating its activities particularly in the area of technical vocational skills acquisition, building reliable labour market information systems, certification and the application of the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) in a way and manner as to fully serve the objectives it was established.

In the area of skills acquisition, which is considered by many as the universal currency of this century and the most sustainable solution to resolving most of the problems bedeviling the Nation and coupled with the fact that other countries across the globe had chosen the same path to remarkable results, Management resolved that the ITF will immediately commence the implementation of deliberate and diversified efforts to address the problems confronting the Nation. We will also strive to open up greater access for Nigerians desirous of acquiring skills by establishing vocational wings in all our Area Offices, acquiring more training vans, establishing more Industrial Skills Training Centres as well as see to fruition the establishment of specialised skills centres and six Centres for Advanced Skills Training for Employment (CASTE)

in the six geo-political zones, which shall be equipped with up-to-date equipment to impart cutting-edge in-demand skills to Nigerians. Special attention will be paid to developing relevant skills along the agricultural value chain in view of its great potential to create employment and reduce poverty. To this end, the Fund will develop demonstration farms across the country to train farmers and extension workers. The farms, which will be modeled after our demonstration farm in Ofadaland, Ogun State, will give vent to Federal Government's efforts to diversify the economy, and boost agricultural yield across the country.

For lack of time, I may be unable to go into details of other areas of focus we have earmarked for priority attention. But as we enter the next phase of our life as an organisation, I am desirous of seeing an ITF that has answered its name as the leading learning and development Agency that Nigerians can depend upon to facilitate the development of the National economy. I would like to see an ITF that adds value in taking Nigeria to be among the top in the comity of Nations. I will also want to see an ITF that competes favourably with other learning and development Agencies worldwide. I would like to see an ITF that grows not just into an household name where every young Nigerian would see as a pride of place to belong to in terms of actualising his or her career prospects. Finally, I would like to see an ITF that will lubricate the industrial hub of the country by ensuring that industries in the country operate optimally.

From what I have outlined, in terms of the prevalent situation in the country and our vision going forward, we as the incumbent staff of the Fund, are at an important threshold in our

organisation's development - that is, sustaining the tremendous successes recorded by the ITF over the last 50 years and applying our mandate in a manner that will address some of the problems that I earlier mentioned. However, for our vision to be achieved, we as the incumbent workforce of the Fund must resolve to be more proactive, effective, creative, resilient and work with greater intensity as unto God. In this regard, we are not short of models as the ITF has always had a tradition of hard work and discipline that is passed on from generation to generation of the Fund's workforce. We cannot therefore drop the baton. The formidable organisation we inherited must be handed over to the next generation just as our forebears did.

Therefore, as we move into this new phase in the Fund's history, I want to urge us to continue to imbibe and exhibit our coveted core values of Integrity, Efficiency and Effectiveness, Commitment, Loyalty, Teamwork, Professionalism and Creativity. These values that have been instrumental to building the ITF we are all proud of today.

I will not conclude my address without acknowledging the vision and foresight of our founding fathers; the unrelenting and unwavering support of the Organised Private Sector (OPS), the industry and commitment and dedication of the ITF workforce past and present and other invaluable stakeholders. As we move into the next phase, we appeal for your continued support, dedication and hard work so that we march with determination and tenacity of purpose that will see us gather like this again to celebrate the centenary of the ITF.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for honouring our invitation and may God continue to bless our collective efforts to develop our dear country.

Long live the ITF!

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!!