

EXPLOITS OF A REFORMER in TETFund

Echono, who said Nigeria, cannot afford to be left behind in technological development, posited that technological development holds the massive key to overcoming challenges bedeviling the country. According to him, "The world has witnessed tremendous transformation with technology at the center stage, transforming lives, creating jobs and impacting nations. Most great nations that have developed were able to attain such heights through education, technological evolution as well as revolution which were all steeped in insatiable quest for knowledge. "This thirst for better ways of doing things has resulted in innovations which brought about the development of new technologies, new products, and transformations in the telecommunication industry and new ways of existence. "The emergence of the digital age has presented the world with no alternative than to adapt to the emerging realities. Consequently, nations and citizens are compelled to either develop, or remain as second-class nations that would continuously depend on and serve other nations that have advanced through learning and impactful research,"





Distinguished Sen. Ned Nwoko and NANS \at TETFUND for strategic consultations

The man Sonny Echono who many described as an accomplished technocrat is a core reformer who had always left indelible marks on the sand of time wherever fate brings him to serve his fatherland. He carries with him a mien of astuteness, intelligence and administrative knack that ranks him as one of the best the black race has to offer. A very humble and unassuming personality he bears an aura that endears him to the low, high and mighty as he brings to every opportunity that come his way, diverse wealth of experience spanning Infrastructure, business administration, procurement management, ICT and the education sectors. Prior to his appointment, he had served as Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry of Education and Member, Board of Trustees of TETFund among other important national assignments. A thorough bred Civil Servant, with almost 35 years of exemplary service, Arc. Echono enjoys the admiration and respect of his peers and superior. During the period, he has been at the epicenter of Policy Formulation and Reforms in the Nigerian Civil Service and its agencies including: Review of Administrative Guidelines in the Nigerian Civil Service Harmonization of Financial Regulations with Public Procurement Act 2007 National Housing and Urban Development Policies National Maintenance Policy National Building Code and Fire Safety Code Procurement Reforms and Due Process Guidelines for Nigeria Modernization of the Nigerian Armed Forces Review of Federal Government Projects Implementation Framework/Manual Agricultural Transformation Agenda-Policy/Implementation National

ICT Sector Roadmap and e-Government Master Plan, Education for Change: A Ministerial Strategic Plan, etc. Arch. Sunday S. T. Echono was appointed as a Permanent Secretary in the Federal Civil Service in October 2014. He has served as Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2014-2015), Federal Ministry of Communications (2015- 2017), and until his new appointment retired as the Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Education (2017 to January 2022). Prior to his appointment as Permanent Secretary in October, 2014, Arch. Sonny Echono served as Director of Procurement in five key Ministries namely- Defence, Water Resources, Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development as well as Power. His Service to the profession of Architecture in Nigeria is equally impressive. From being Secretary of the Admissions Committee in 1991, he rose to the position of Honourary General Secretary (HGS) in November 2001. He chaired the Disciplinary Committee of the Institute for two successive terms from 2009 to 2013, when he was elected to the position of the 3rd Vice President. He attained the pinnacle of the profession when he was elected in November 2019.

He also served on several Boards and Councils including- Board of Architectural Education in Nigeria (BAE), Architects Registration Council of Nigeria, National Environmental Standards, Regulations, Enforcement and Administration (NESREA), International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA),



The TETFund boss believes that transparency and accountability are also crucial in addressing some of the challenges in the operations of the agency. He argues that through greater accountability, the leaky pipes of corruption and inefficiency will be repaired, and funds will be channeled more effectively towards initiatives and programmes that will produce more significant and visible results. True to his words, transparency and accountability have been entrenched in the operations of TETFund. He initiated practical reforms aimed at promoting prudent spending, curbing financial leakages and wastages, and ending programmes or projects that were not productive to the agency or tertiary institutions across the country.

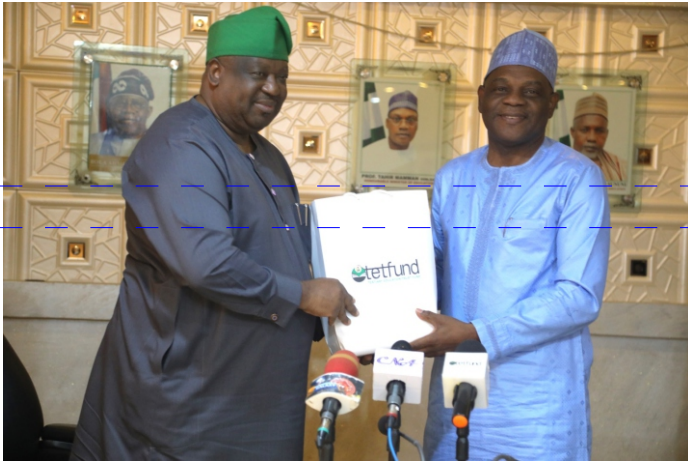
Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) etc. He attended several management courses and workshops at top institutions across the globe including:-University of Bradford, UK Oxford University, UK University of Cambridge, UK Japan International Cooperation Agency, Japan Institute of Development Studies, Indonesia International Law Institute, USA American Institute of Peace, USA Harvard Business School USA, etc. He is a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Architects, Founding Member and Trustee of the Procurement Professionals Association of Nigeria.

He is a recipient of several awards of excellence and commendation by the Federal Government as well as Professional and Management Institutions. He is widely travelled and has presented over 40 papers at national and international forums. He had an impressive outing at the helms of affairs at the federal level. His humility, qualifications, influence, in-depth knowledge of governance was also unparalleled. Architect Sonny Sylva

Togo Echono is married and the union is blessed with children.

In recent times, the activities of the TETFund have continued to elicit commendation from critical stakeholders in light of the visible improvements in the fulfillment of the operational mandate of the agency. In some quarters, this has been ascribed to the exploits of its Executive Secretary, Arc. Sunny Echono. When President Muhammadu Buhari approved the appointment of Arc. Sunny Echono as the executive secretary of TETFund, many positives were expected of the former Permanent Secretary whose performances in the Education sector had been stellar. It was expected that he would bring to the table wealth of experiences spanning diverse sectors. A reformer to the core, his ascension to the TETFund leadership, was another opportunity for him to showcase the instrumentality of transparency and accountability in delivering excellent results. And so far, he has not disappointed. With in-depth experience in civil service and administrative positions, Arc Echono's obsession





H. E. Governor Caleb mutfwang of Plateau pays a courtesy visit to TETFUND

with exceptional service delivery has never been in doubt. Soon after taking over the affairs of TETFund, Echono sort to consolidate and improve upon the reforms initiated by his predecessors. He is currently addressing the challenges associated with building a solid relationship between academia and other sectors. The Echono-led administration has created an endless source of the academic workforce needed for national development

through strategic innovations and programmes. To his credit, TETFund brokered top local and international partnerships and initiated initiatives and programmes beneficial to achieving excellence in Nigeria's Tertiary institutions.

Since he assumed office, the Executive Secretary of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), Arc. Sonny Echono has been forging strategic partnership for development of technology in the African Sub-region as well as with notable institutions, including "The University of Brazil, Vicosa, for the training of more Nigerian professionals in agriculture, secured transnational cooperation with the government of Britain, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) as well as the African Union (AU) in areas of research and collaboration that would aid the growth and development of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Arc. Sonny Echono affirmed that the Fund is committed to the development of technology in the African sub-region. This he made known when the African Union Commissioner for Education, Science and Technology, Prof Mohammed Belhocine along with officials from the Pan African University paid him a visit in his office in Abuja. The Executive Secretary stated that, "the government of Nigeria thinks in the direction of promoting technology and we are in the process of establishing a national institute here in Abuja. There will be a post graduate institution, which is also intended to stimulate the technological transformation of our country. "The Pan African University also fits into this general framework, and we believe the partnership will enable us to learn one or two things to attract the right faculties and the right scholars into the University, and how we can also build on that", he added. According to him, the Fund was delighted with the philosophy and approach of the Pan African University towards creating more Pan African



Universities for young African students, which will yield a more beneficial and prosperous future for the country and committed to forge a relationship with the Pan African University to push the African Union (AU) agenda and that of the university forward. He said, 'I can assure you that as soon as we get your request, we should be able to build on that and forge the right partnership that will enable us to push the idea of the African Union forward. I would like to assure you that within the framework that we have, we will give you the maximum support to make that building functional as soon as possible'. In his remarks, Professor Mohammed Belhocine expressed gratitude to TETFund for its support to the Pan African University sited at the University of Ibadan, saying it wouldn't have been possible without the Fund's support. He said, "We are very grateful for that. We are sure that it will create better working conditions for our Pan African University. Nigeria has been one of the advocates for the creation of this University, which is now 10 years in existence"

"The Pan African University is very important in terms of bringing young Africans together, because so far, we have been able to train more than 1500 Master's Degree holders in different fields of study, and more than 400 PhDs. And these people come from 50 different nationalities. That is the most important thing for us. It's not about technical performance, but more about how we are bringing young Africans together. "When these Africans come together for a curriculum of 4-5 years, they get to know each other better, their cultures, their languages, and their beliefs and this creates the idea of Pan Africanism", Professor Belhocine noted.

Playing host to a delegation led by the Deputy British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mr Benedict Llewellyn-Jones and the UK Government International Education Champion, Professor (Sir) Steve Smith early in his administration, the Executive Secretary said the exigencies of the current knowledge and technology driven age, has led the focus of the Fund more in the direction of outcome-based education for Nigerian students. He maintained the organization is resolute in developing Centres of Excellence, establishing Mega Research Grant Intervention, encouraging Entrepreneurship among others, all in a bid to ensure that Nigeria's tertiary institutions become the drivers of technological advancement, growth and development for the nation at large.

Responding, Professor Smith said the United Kingdom was ready to assist in pushing the ambitious plan of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards developing a plan to improve trans-border education on a sustainable basis and for the long term. He affirmed the imperative of expanding learning frontiers wherein, institutions in the United Kingdom would partner with Nigerian Universities in a robust and an all-inclusive educational cooperation.

The Belgian delegation led by the Director of Internalization, Ghent University, Professor Guido Van Huylenbroeck also spoke on the need for partnering with Nigerian universities on Research and Development as a

precursor to identifying problems in the Nigerian academic space with a view towards proffering the right solutions for solving them. Clearly disturbed by numerous research outputs lying dormant in Nigeria's libraries, and the fact that few existing repositories are not readily accessible to national or global audience, Architect Echono also set up early to inaugurate a Steering and Coordinating Committee on "Thesis Digitisation", led by Professor Yakubu Ochefu, the Secretary-General of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors. To him, and with the backing of experts, the need for a National Academic Research Repository (NARR) or a National Knowledge Bank (NKB) was compelling in order to find digitized homes for a lot of high quality research papers which had accumulated over the years. The Executive Secretary wasted no time in embracing an "anti-plagiarism" device developed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors to stem plagiarized research works and promote originality in academic research; describing it as ~~a useful tool in correcting the quality of poor thesis churned out by graduates of institutions of higher learning~~ in Nigeria. Inadequate foreign exchange, poor book quality and escalating demand for published works amongst other militating factors have been the bane of the Academia for a good number of years. To tackle this lingering menace, the TETFund Management, through its inventive Higher Education Book Development Project sponsored during the past year, the publications of 60 indigenous textbooks for use in the Nigerian academic community.

Lauding the TETFund initiative, the then Minister of Education Mallam Adamu, speaking through the former Minister of State, Rt. Honourable Goodluck Nanah Opiah stated that the dearth of high standard tertiary level textbooks has reached near endemic proportions and that the quality of the Books' authorship and the local domiciliation of their production will engender the availability of suitable books in varied disciplines, safeguard national pride and also ease pressure on scarce foreign exchange. Even though he has ensured that intervention lines are promptly made available to Nigeria's public tertiary institutions, and a good number of physical projects, running into hundreds of billions, are being commissioned in droves, across various institutions of higher learning since his assumption of office, the Executive Secretary never hid his passion for the "...institutionalization of Research & Development (R&D) and ensure that the research outputs from our tertiary institutions are tailored towards solving our societal problems to enhance national development".

December 14, 2022, remains one of the proud moments for Nigeria, as the Triple Helix Model (defined in the 5th paragraph above), roared to life, with the unveiling of a group of 71 academics (broken into teams), and selected across the nation's tertiary institutions to undertake research in various fields under TETFAIR (TETFund Alliance for Innovative Research). The unique component of the Fair (billed to run for 12 months) is to guide innovation through processing or production, and

ensure that finished products are matched with commercial viability. The 71 egg-heads will be exposed to International Mentorship for capacity enhancement, and would also be taught on techniques of product patenting, in conformity with best global practices. TETFAIR is set to confront some of Nigeria's challenges head-on, with home-grown innovations, ventures, job creation and would spur a constant stream of foreign exchange earnings in the near future.

Taking its definitive commitment to R&D further, the Fund's sponsored COVID-19 vaccine development is now set for preclinical trial. The giant feat was achieved by researchers from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, in collaboration with others from the University of Jos; National Research Institute for Chemical Technology (NARICT) Zaria; Nigeria Medical Research Institute (NMRI) Yaba, Lagos; and National Veterinary Research Institute (NVRI), Vom, near Jos.

The vaccine development is definitely a game changer given the fact the remarkable achievement was recorded by a consortium of indigenous scientists, who are also currently working on the development of Lassa fever vaccine amongst many others. Perhaps there's nothing more disheartening than watching the number of unemployed graduates grow, year-on-year, with few employment opportunities in sight. Lack of rewarding job engagement has devolved into cataclysmic waves of advance fee fraud, armed robbery, prostitution, drug trafficking, kidnapping and general restiveness among Nigerian youths, today. Yet, a considerable number of graduates being churned out are either deemed unfit for purpose, or generally unemployable by few organizations that are hiring. Recently, TETFund commenced the "Employability Benchmarking Programme" in Nigeria's tertiary institutions in active collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and other partners, as a way of tackling the composite challenges of unemployment (33%); youth unemployment (42.5 %) and youth underemployment (21%), as lately put out by the National Bureau of Statistics.



HE Usman Ododo of Kogi state
Pay a courtesy visit to TETFUND for consultations



Architect Echono stated that the programme is geared towards improving graduate employability, and as a corollary, assist higher institutions in making the requisite tweaks in their curriculum, and in alignment with market dictates. The programme dubbed "IFC Vitae", has been deployed to a good number of institutions of higher learning around the world as a way of forging pathways for improving graduate outcomes and instituting goals for graduate employability. Described as "Marvellous Disruptor in Nigeria's Education Space", "Encyclopedia of University Education in Nigeria", "Apostle of Digital Education in Nigeria" and other sundry monikers by admirers, it is not



surprising that President Mohammed Buhari found it worthy to bestow a National honour – Officer of The Order of The Niger (OON), on Architect Sonny S.T. Echono. The award is a true recognition of his decades of beneficent service to the nation, in diverse Class-A Ministries and Departments of Government, which undoubtedly, has prepared him for his current role.

TETFund under Arc Sonny Echono has been working assiduously hard to bridge the gap between research, ideas and innovation. This was clearly evident when the beneficiaries of the Research for Impact (R4i) initiative 8.0, put in place by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in collaboration with Innov8 Hub have commended the Fund for creating a positive impact into their lives and boosting innovation in the country. R4i is a ground-breaking initiative of TETFund in collaboration with Innov8 Hub which aims to equip members of Nigerian academia from various public higher institutions with the necessary skills, processes and procedures needed to create innovative solutions from their research ideas, in order to tackle real-world challenges. So far, the collaboration has reintroduced research and development through innovation to Nigeria, strengthening the Triple Helix Synergy by bringing together the Government, Academia, and Industry for a brighter and more innovative future. The initiative has since empowered members of the Nigerian Academia from various tertiary institutions across the country to develop innovative prototypes and is a key part of TETFund's strategic plan to promote research and innovation in Nigerian universities and is helping to bridge the gap between research ideas and solutions. Recently, 18 participants who were nominated from Polytechnics across Nigeria's geo-political zones to undergo rigorous processes and procedures at Innov8 Hub completed their training.

The participants were divided into 4 teams, with each team dedicated to addressing crucial societal challenges. These teams included: No Poverty, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education and Affordable and Clean Energy. The participants testified that "The R4i has equipped you with in-depth knowledge and skills to understand problems before proposing solutions. We are immensely grateful to TETFund and innov8 hub for their support and guidance which has played a crucial role in our journey." The Closing Event also witnessed the presence of members from the Government, Academia, and Industry. Prominent among them were the Executive Secretaries of TETFund, Arch. Sonny Echono and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Prof. Idris Muhammad Bugaje. Speaking at the closing ceremony of the training programme in Abuja recently, Executive Secretary of TETFund, Arc. Sonny Echono, said the initiative organised in collaboration with Innov8 Hub, is aimed at promoting innovation and viable research in higher education institutions.

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technological development holds the massive key to overcoming challenges bedeviling the country. According to him, "The world has witnessed tremendous transformation with technology at the center stage, transforming lives, creating jobs and impacting nations. Most great nations that have developed were able to attain such heights through education, technological evolution as well as revolution which were all steeped in insatiable quest for knowledge. "This thirst for better ways of doing things has resulted in innovations which brought about the development of new technologies, new products, and transformations in the telecommunication industry and new ways of existence. "The emergence of the digital age has presented the world with no alternative than to adapt to the emerging realities. Consequently, nations and citizens are compelled to either develop, or remain as second-class nations that would continuously depend on and serve other nations that have advanced through learning and impactful research,"

While appreciating Innov8 Hub for its willingness to partner with TETFund to propagate and advance an innovation ecosystem in the Nigerian tertiary education sphere, Echono pledged the commitment of the agency to continue to invest in research as the foundation for Nigeria's emergence as a knowledge-based economy. "At TETFund, we established a Research and Development/ Centres of Excellence Department to drive the institutionalization of Research and Development in public tertiary institutions, enhance research capacity, support Research-Industry, among others. The Research for Impact Workshop is one of the programmes aimed at supporting market driven research for national development. "At this point, it is important to use this opportunity to restate TETFund's commitment to promote the commercialization of viable R&D results and patents. This should serve as further incentive to the Teams to take their prototype to the next phase," he said.

The Executive Secretary further expressed hope that the two weeks of intense research activities undergone by the 18 lecturers would stimulate knowledge sharing, collaboration, growth and excellence among participants and their various colleagues. On his part, the Executive Secretary of National Board for Technical Education, Professor Idris Bugaje, challenged the participants to work as a team and also shared knowledge gained with other lecturers in their various institutions. The NBTE boss commended TETFund for the (R4i) initiative, describing it as the most important thing that has ever happened in Nigerian polytechnics in the area of research and innovation promotion. "I have also been told that what we have here in Innov8 Hub, will be replicated in selected polytechnics across the country. This is the best way to go," Bugaje said.

Also speaking, Chief Facilitator, Research for Impact Workshop, Innov8 Hub, Dr Obichi Obiajunwa, said the 18 lecturers had undergone an intensive two-week

Arc. Echono has so far shown great courage; he does not shy away from stepping on toes in his determination to provide purposeful leadership. It is on record that the era of frivolous programmes and initiatives without benefits to the operational mandate of the agency has been discontinued and replaced with laudable programmes with an impact on the promotion of focused and transformative intervention in public Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. Also, in line with his agenda of accountability and transparency, Arch Echono reviewed the agency's procurement processes to conform to standard practices and extant laws. He also championed the ongoing reorientation of the agency's workforce through seminars and workshops to acquaint workers with the new practice. This ultimately discouraged the deployment of unethical practices within the agency.

programme, where they were equipped with the tools to commercialize their research and develop solutions to real-world problems aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "The essence of this workshop has been to empower our researchers to translate their invaluable work (all of those incredible

fabrication projects you handle in school) into societal value." Through their dedication and hard work, they have taken curates problems within the SDGs and transformed them into four remarkable prototypes in just ten days. " This achievement reflects not only their ingenuity and passion but also their unwavering commitment to creating a positive impact in our society," Obiajunwa said. The event also showcased pitch videos of the prototypes developed by each team. Team No Poverty presented Digifact, a digital data-collecting platform designed for teachers. The innovation has the potential to empower educators, increasing their earnings, and reducing poverty among low-income teachers. Team Good Health and Well-Being created Skinchek, a skin moisture detector created to identify moisture-associated skin disorders, promoting better health and well-being. The Quality Education Team unveiled LECTUREAID. The innovation is an education platform for displaying teaching materials and conducting practical activities, enhancing the overall quality of education. Team Affordable and Clean Energy presented GreenRadiant. This innovation represents a solar IOT-based micro-grid system designed for smart energy control and consumption management. Under his leadership TETFund initiated a Digitization Project Steering and Coordinating Committee with the mandate to create a national research bank to serve as a repository for academic work and to generate an extensive collation of local institutional research into Digital Repositories in line with international standards in public tertiary institutions across the country. Also, under his watch, TETFund set up a Coordinating Secretariat to operationalize the partnership between the government, private sector and academia.

The TETFund boss believes that transparency and accountability are also crucial in addressing some of the challenges in the operations of the agency. He argues that through greater accountability, the leaky pipes of corruption and inefficiency will be repaired, and funds will be channeled more effectively towards initiatives and programmes that will produce more significant and visible results. True to his words, transparency and accountability have been entrenched in the operations of TETFund. He initiated practical reforms aimed at promoting prudent spending, curbing financial leakages and wastages, and ending programmes or projects that were not productive to the agency or tertiary institutions across the country.

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Kwara state governor and Chairmen, Nigeria Governors Forum, HE Abdulrahman, accompanied by three Lawmakers paid a courtesy visit to TETFUND

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In the words of renowned author, Horace Jackson Brown Jr (March 14, 1940 – November 30, 2021), "The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today". The Executive Secretary is living this creed, day to day. With so many outstanding achievements tucked under his belt within a time-frame of over one year, it is certain that Nigeria is yet to witness the best of this all-encompassing, well-grounded and brainiest technocrat.

