
AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BY ROBERT BONIFACE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AT THE 1ST INTERDISCIPLINARY
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD ON NOVEMBER 14-15, 2012 AT THE APER AKU
AUDITORIUM, UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE MARKURDI

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Distinguished Participants,
Fellow Panelists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a very special honour to be your host here at Makurdi and a great privilege to welcome you to this Interdisciplinary International Conference on the theme **Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation: Opportunities and Platforms for Global Sustainable Development** organized by Centre for Research and Innovation and Cosponsored by International Sustainable Development Research Centre and Lead Performance Alliance. I am particularly indebted to Prof. Sam Ale, Director General National Mathematical Centre, Abuja and Assoc. Prof. Abdul-rahman Olalekan Olayiwola, Head, Department of Political Science, Lagos State University for agreeing to present the keynote address; both of whom have taken active initiatives to energize academic research with institution like National Mathematical Centre and the Lagos State University respectively.

Centre for Research and Innovation as most of you know, is an internationally respected Research Centre, pursuing innovative and rigorous research that influences policy and practice, an independent research organization dedicated to promote and encourage the pursuit of educational research and its application for both the improvement of educational practice and industrial development of Africa. The main agenda of Centre for Research and Innovation is to lead-in economic development by connecting business, research, education, government and talent to advance infrastructure development that will enhance quality of life. We have organized a number of conferences and brought out quite a few publications. We have been working in close co-operation with academic institutions, industry and, of course, the government. The title of this conference as you will notice contains four significant keywords **Interdisciplinary, Research, Platform, and Sustainable Development**. The future of Africa will not be determined by our politician. The future of Africa will be determined by the effective combination of research and its practical application which will benefit the society. The answer to Africa's challenge I believe, is more, and better, education. The key to our development does not lie at the bottom of the ocean; it lies in the centre of our heads and our greatness in the wisdom.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As institutions that not only transmit knowledge, but are also at the forefront of creating it, universities are central to bringing about sustainable societies. Higher education institutions train individuals to become highly-skilled in areas of critical importance to socio-cultural, economic and environmental development. They foster responsible citizenship. They carry out highly-regarded research and develop innovations. Within the education system as a whole, they often train teachers for primary, secondary and even non-formal education, and design curricula. They fashion the leaders of tomorrow.

The reason for slow progress in Africa is not funds but priority. I am aware that after years of economic difficulties, almost all sectors of our national life have been starved of sufficient resources making it extremely difficult for our national planners to prioritize. However, in the midst of all of these pressing national demands, we must identify the sector from which a chain reaction of development can grow and impact the whole. It is my considered view that education must be seen as crucial sector that propels the engine of growth for an improved Africa. The quality of our education will impact on the quality of our wisdom. If we continue to provide mediocre education, we will continue to have mediocre citizens who are incapable of delivering the human resource capacity for real social change.

To build a modern industrial society, we must emphasize on world class education. For Nigeria to be innovative it must shift. It must do things differently from our old model of hasty, unplanned and uninterested development which has retarded our progress for too long. Let us start afresh by creating a new master piece.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the current picture of Africa is not a good one. The original joy and hope that the founding fathers of Africa's emancipation announced after the attainment of independence appears shipwrecked by our own acts of irresponsibility. In the place of hope and happiness a spirit of self-doubt and passivity; has arisen. Experts have predicted that unless some very radical changes take place in the way our continent responds to its challenges, we shall continue to witness an ever widening gap between the standard of living in Africa and the rest of the industrialized world. It is sad to observe that, in the absence of innovative thought, our national debates have been confined to that which is biased and uninspiring. Most of the concepts espoused through the media and in the domain of popular culture are as meaningless as their absence. They entrench the old assumptions that Africans do not have the capacity to wrestle with the weightier matters of nationhood and development.

Human history has shown that for any people to graduate from a dependent and subservient life to a more dominant life, the ideas that shape the choices of the people will have to be

deliberately constructed. This conference is geared toward aiding us reinvent and strengthen our research efforts and design capacity and methodologies that advance the concepts of sustainability and resilience. Research and Sustainable development are inextricably linked. One cannot be achieved without the other. Today, both require a new impetus from all of us. Both require our conviction, our commitment, and our consistency. This conference is a step forward for the global movement in favour of higher education for sustainable development. Indeed, while the circumstances you face in your own universities and countries may differ, the task at hand is one that is relevant to all regions.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

By convening this First Interdisciplinary International Conference on "Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation: Opportunities and Platform for Global Sustainable Development", the Centre for Research and Innovations and International Sustainable Development Research Centre have demonstrated their commitment to engaging debate on a subject that is of vital importance to the future of our societies – and our planet as a whole. With so many decision-makers and scholars gathered here in the next few days, we have a rare opportunity to put higher education firmly at the centre of international efforts in favour of sustainability. We *can* create a world in which cooperation, rather than competition, drives innovation and progress in higher education.

As you debate the issues, I urge you to consider what concrete actions you can take – in your own countries and universities, but also with others – to translate the principles of sustainable development into clearly-defined actions.

Let me take this opportunity to thank The Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi once again, for their great support and encouragement in making this important Conference a reality.

I look forward to hearing your ideas. Thank you.