

FUTO: Rescuing Nigeria from technological backwardness



Minister of Education, Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili

Joe Nwachukwu writes on the contributions of federal universities of technology to technological development in Nigeria, focusing on the Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri.

The establishment of federal universities of technology in the country was informed by the absolute desire of the federal government to achieve growth in technology.

This is because of the well-known fact that no country can achieve greatness without growth in technology. Hence, the establishment of these universities of technology.

Since science in this new era has made the world a global village with new discoveries, scientists have continued to do more research in different aspects of science. Each country of the world is doing her best to improve on discoveries that will assist mankind and gain recognition world over.

It was based on this that the Federal Government decided to establish four federal universities of technology in the country to compliment the efforts of polytechnics. The federal universities of technology are found in Owerri, Akure, Minna, Yola, Bauchi and Benue states.

These universities of technology, from the available records, are doing fine to justify the effort of Nigeria's founding fathers. According to reports, efforts are being made by the Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Education, to pump more money into research by these universities. This, it is believed, will enable them improve on different areas of their research.

Most of the multinational oil companies and other related companies that operate in the country employ graduates that passed through these universities of technology, knowing their worth in the field of science of technology .

The 1980's marked a turning point in the history of university education in Nigeria. There was an urgent need for skilled manpower in Nigeria. It was in June 1980 that a decision was taken by the president in-council to establish a university of technology in different parts of the country which, hitherto, had no university.

However, the Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri, was the first to start. It started operating on November 28, 1980 in the premises of the old government technical college, Owerri, with a compliment of ten academic staff, borrowed from Imo State civil service.

From squatting at the Government Technical College, Owerri, the university moved its operation to Ikenegbu and later to its temporary site, the lake Nwaebere campus named after a seasonal water point which affects the entire area. It must be noted that this site was built for the Federal Government Girls' College, Owerri and is situated along Samek Road, off Okigwe Road Owerri.

As time went on, the university acquired a permanent site of about 4,580 hectares of land belonging to Iheagwa, Eziobodo Okoloche, Emeabiam, Obinze and Nnekede. All these communities are in Owerri West Local Government area of Imo State.

The development of the permanent site of the school started in 1985, but was grossly slowed down due to inadequate funds for the execution of projects. Any case work resumed with improved funding from government in earnest with the result that by 1991 a number of projects were completed and handed over to the university.

However, academic activities started in the university in the 1981/82 academic session with only one school; the School of Natural and Applied Sciences now known as the School of Science.

A critical point in the history of the university development was reached in January 1993. As a result of pressure that was mounted on the school authority from the Federal Government, the university was forced to make a hurried movement out of its temporary site at the lake Nwaebere campus, into the virgin woodlands of its permanent site at Ihiagwa.

However, due to the leadership quality of the then Vice-chancellor, Professor C. O. G Obah, the university had no choice other than to move to its permanent site in January 1983. Since then, a multitude of buildings and facilities have been completed at the permanent site.

The Federal University of Technology, Owerri, came to maturity, when in December 1986, it turned out its first batch of 67 graduates from the School of Science. The number of graduates increased to 175 during the 1980/87 session and has continued to increase to about 2,000 graduates in the 1999/ 2000 session.

The Vice-chancellor of the university, Professor C. E. Onwuliri has on the occasion of its 25th Matriculation Ceremony informed the students that with the reform in the institution, there would be no hiding places for academic misfits, mediocres, cultists, exam cheats and the likes.