

NIGERIA
Igbinedion University , Okada.
16th Convocation Lecture

**'Implementing SDGs in African Universities - moving
from Rhetoric to Action'**

Honourable Vice Chancellor, Invited Guests

I'm humbled to present the 16th Convocation lecture today.

I see my predecessor, Her Excellency Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo, chose the theme 'Restructuring and the Future of Nigeria ' in her presentation to this University last year, in 2017.

This was a lofty title. I would have loved to be there to hear her talk.

I will also try in my presentation to set an ambitious Goal.

In fact what I would like to do is to use this speech to issue a challenge to this University, in fact a whole set of challenges, challenges that could bring national and international recognition to this University.

Indeed, I would like this University to be a pioneer, a champion, a world leader.

But firstly I'd like to tell you a proverb. When I was an EU Ambassador on the other side of the continent, in Ethiopia and Tanzania, I started every day with an African proverb, which I sent to my staff, and to all my fellow European Ambassadors. I called this African Wisdom – a daily reminder of where I was based and how to respect African traditions, African culture, African wisdom – in fact the

uniqueness of African 's own Identity and Vision. Over the years I have sent out thousands of them, culled from all sorts of sources.

Nigerian has hundreds of proverbs. I've read over 450 on the internet. I've selected these two ones because I hope you will think about these when hopefully you reflect on what I have said today:

'There are no short cuts to the top of a palm tree'

and

'There are no witnesses to a dream'

You have heard that Nigeria has a special place in my heart. For four years, 1993-1997, I was what they called in the European Commission, the Desk Officer for Nigeria, then the European Commission Head of Unit for the West African Region.

I travelled extensively around the country. I met amazing people. I have vivid memories of being enchanted by the singing of Fela Kuti in the Shrine, of the sonorous voice and wisdom of Professor Wole Soyinke, and of the sinister car cavalcade and dark glasses of General Abacha the Nigerian President at that time. I remember the Emir of Borno being carried in a sedan chair into a planning workshop I was attending. I remember driving across Borno state over arid desert sands, which, according to my map, should have been forest. Of course these were also the days before the terror of Boko Haram.

Perhaps my most vivid moment was hearing, on a visit to an EU-financed tea project on the Mambilla Plateau, of the hanging that day, 10th November 1995, of Ken Saro Wiwa, one of my environmental heroes, whom I had met in my

office in Brussels several months before as he explained to me the plight of the Ogoni people and the problems of oil pollution.

I was stunned. I was summoned back to Brussels and directed to close down the EU's € 500 million development co-operation programme to Nigeria and to re-allocate funds away from Government-led projects to those supported by civil society and human rights groups.

Some of the people I met in those days, 25 years ago, were campaigning for democracy and human rights, a person such as Kayode Fayemi, Governor of Ekiti State, who is now one of Nigeria's new leaders.

What have all these memories got to do with this speech ?

Well for me, they are part of my own identity, my own being, my own culture and learning process. It explains in some small way my affection for Nigeria and my sense of pride and joy in meeting Vice Chancellor Lawrence and Dr Akan when I was doing some voluntary work after my retirement at the Lancaster University Centre for Global Eco-Innovation. These are a new generation of Nigerian leaders, inspirational, motivated, keen to mark out a new Vision for Nigeria.

Indeed, it was with them that I cooked up the idea of promoting the creation of Regional Eco-Innovation Centres in Africa, bringing together Universities, local government authorities, Small and Medium-Sized Businesses and local communities: creating synergies, catalysing ideas, focusing on innovation and producing 'green' products that would provide for the needs of communities at a grass roots level.

Today I want to talk about the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals** and what they mean for Africa, and more particularly for this University.

There are 17 Goals and 169 Targets – most of you in this audience will be vaguely aware they exist. Approved in New York in September 2015 at the UN General Assembly, they are the successors to the Millennium Development Goals - the MDGs - that development practitioners have used for many years to set goals, targets, and indicators to achievement in many areas such as access to Water, Health, Education, and Food security. At that time the UNDP Human Development Index had been developed as one of the statistical innovations for measuring progress in achieving these goals.

SDGs are similar in some ways to the MDGs, but there is a unique difference: ALL UN Nation states are committed to achieving them, with 2030 as the agreed Timeline to meet the SDG Targets. A 15 year implementation period. The clock is ticking...

Of course, every UN state starts from a different base. The challenges for African countries are much, much higher than for most other continents. By signing up to the SDGs, every country commits to putting in place a development strategy tailor-made to its own needs.

One of the most important ones for this audience and my presentation is SDG 4 on Education:

‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’

And the particular one I want to talk about now is SDG 4.7 – Education for Sustainable Development, which urges the world to :

'Ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development'

Curiously – and this is a much wider issue that cannot really be discussed here – Africa's own **Continental Education Strategy 2016-2025 (CESA)**, which was adopted by African Union Heads of State on 31st January 2016, three months later than the adoption of the SDGs, is completely silent on the SDGs...

At the time the SDGs were approved I had already retired, and had been doing voluntary work for a number of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in Europe who had been campaigning for a paradigm shift in education and in our lifestyles. I'd also been doing some work for Lancaster University's Centre for Global Eco-Innovation.

The NGOs and Academics in Universities had seen that there simply were not enough resources on the planet to maintain the sort of lifestyles that a European or an American would consider 'normal'. We had already reached the 'tipping point', using more resources than our single Earth can provide, and exceeding a number of so-called 'planetary boundaries.'

Collectively, the world was living beyond its means. We had passed the tipping point several years ago. We were on a cliff edge, ready to fall off into the abyss.

I was in campaigning mode. I wrote to the UN system on behalf of some of the NGOs that I helped, saying enough is enough ! The world community has to wake up. We cannot go on as we are. Who wants to leave such a world to the next generation ? I of course was not the only one to make these pleas.

But strangely, surprisingly, the world seemed to listen to the clamour for change. The UN launched an highly consultative, inclusive process and started setting out a new agenda for the world, the Agenda 2030, that would bind all countries across the planet to meet internationally agreed targets. There was a lot of horse -trading, compromises, consensus – seeking, and gradually the demands of government and civil society seemed to coalesce, and agreement was reached on 17 Goals and 169 Targets.

At first sight this seems nonsense. How can you possibly implement and monitor 169 separate targets and actions ?

But then, the more I thought about it, the more I felt, well, this cannot be too bad, Everyone has agreed, and every state – from Bhutan to Chad, from Brazil to the US, from Nigeria to the Seychelles, has made a commitment to make them happen.

For environmentalists like me – I am an ecologist and started my professional life as an Environmental Campaigner for the UK NGO, Friends of the Earth 40 years ago, this was Utopia, a dream come true...

Sadly, they are voluntary of course, they are not binding . And it is only peer pressure that may convince governments and others to make them happen. In some of the most complicated areas, such as SDG 4.7 on Sustainable Development Education, there are hardly any agreed indicators to measure progress.

At the present time I am working with an NGO, GAIA Education in Scotland, which is part of a coalition of partners, linked to UNESCO, trying to define these at this very moment. GAIA is working in 49 countries on developing MOOCs and Education toolkits for SDGs.

It seemed to me that the world had woken up.

But had it...?

A month ago I attended a meeting in Brussels of the five top European Think Tanks working on Development issues. The topic was Innovation and Development. The EU and its Member States had all signed up to the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The EU had spear-headed much of the international debate around the Paris Treaty on Climate Change. They had produced agreed texts on all sorts of policy initiatives on SDGs, renewables, recycling and the rest. They had initiated an internal debate on the Circular Economy and how this was to be the answer to the problem of Waste.

There would be No Waste, Zero Waste. Waste was not an item to be thrown away and dumped. It had a value. Every single article produced by Humankind should be conceived in such a way as to have a built-in mechanism for re-using the basic raw materials: Fridges, cars, computers, sofas – EVERY SINGLE article had to be constructed in such a way as to allow as close to 100 % recycling as possible.

But the eminent Think Tank Professors came to worrying conclusions. The reality, with a few honourable exceptions, was that no-one was doing anything serious to meet these goals. No political party had taken this on. No Government department within the EU was, with a few laudable exceptions, doing anything to match SDG Goals with action on the ground.

It was empty rhetoric.

So the conclusion that came out was – all this has to change !
SDGs have to be central to the way Europe does business.
The entire EU Budget - € 100 Billion/year - has to be re-focused and targeted on delivering the SDGs.

The five Think Tanks concluded that this has to be the main lobbying message to take to the European Parliament and European Member States in the lead - up to the European Parliamentary elections in mid-2019, and the nomination of a new President of the European Commission and European Commissioners (Ministers) in 2019.

Interestingly, just a month ago, a coalition of over 100 of the key NGOs operating in Europe launched a Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for its Citizens. I wonder if there is any similar movement in Nigeria and the African continent ?

One of the organisations I help as a Board member is ECOLISE: the European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate change and Sustainability. We have 45 member organisations throughout Europe, and as the name suggests we work at grass roots level to support community-led action on climate change and sustainability. We work on a long term strategy and produce a range of publications.

In 2017, with the full support of the European Economic and Social Committee, we co-hosted the first European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC) where we celebrated across Europe the work of local communities to address climate change. On 22nd September this year we had our second EDSC day. Next month, at COP 24 in Poland, we will launch a reflection which we hope will lead to the

nomination and declaration of an International Day of Sustainable Communities.

Civil society is waking up ...and wants to be heard.

At the University level in Africa there seems to be some developing interest. In September this year I attended a big Europe- Africa conference in Yaoundé, Cameroun, co-hosted by the European Commission, the African Association of Universities and others. It was a gathering of the ICQAHEA: the International Conference and Workshops on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa. Over 250 Vice Chancellors, Rectors and Professors from Africa's Higher Education institutions were present.

There were two main themes – Quality Assurance and the SDGs.

One of the questions being posed was: how can African Universities be encouraged to address the SDGs ? What should they do ?

One of the most eminent Professors present, Professor Olugemiro Jegede, a former Secretary General of the Association of African Universities, gave a scary forecast. According to a 2016 UNESCO study that he quoted, Africa had zero chance of meeting the SDGs by 2030. Indeed, it thought it was likely they wouldn't even be met by 2080.

The year 2080. Did you hear that ? 50 years after the UN - agreed date of 2030.

Everyone here sitting in this hall will be dead by then...

In Cameroun I proposed in the conference Communiqué a number of concrete actions that African Universities could take. They could:

- Conduct an internal consultation process to see how the University campus buildings could be retro-fitted to reduce energy and water needs, and promote sustainable lifestyles
- Engage with all academic staff to see how the silo mentality, so common in Universities across the world, could be broken down, so that some of the barriers between the sciences, humanities, and other subjects could be taught in a more integrated and holistic way.

These and other resolutions were adopted. But frankly, I doubt that more than a small handful of African universities will take the concerted steps to make this happen.

I recently discovered a document produced by the Nigerian Government called the National Voluntary Review Report.(Slide) It sets out the structure of the Review, the relationship with the NERGP, the SDG Indicators and the 2017 Budget, and how Nigeria has implemented the SDGs. It is a very interesting document because for the first time it provides a coherent overview of how the Nigerian Government is tackling this issue.

I do not know if anyone in this hall has been part of this process.

The document was issued in June 2017 by Princess Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire, the Senior Specialist Assistant to the President of Nigeria on SDGs. Nigeria was one of 41 countries that volunteered to present its report to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2017 in New York. So far 111 such reports have been submitted since 2016 and a further 44 will be looked at in July 2019 – making a total of 155 out of the UN’s 193 member states.

The Nigeria consultations seem to have been quite thorough and have taken place across the country at State and Federal levels. Civil Society groups have also been part of the process. A range of implementing structure have been put in place under the overall authority of the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President (OSSAP).

Whilst the document is very professional it recognises the immense challenges Nigeria is facing. It identifies 3 critical challenges and concludes with this comment:

‘The Government and the people of Nigeria collectively commit to strengthening the spirit of national ownership to and deepen the process of continuous sensitization and awareness on the SDGs, particularly through a robust and vigorous engagement with the grassroots - based CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) ’

To succeed, it will need a supreme effort.

A UN document was issued in July this year:

The SDG Index and Dashboard Report 2018 – ‘Global responsibilities implementing the Goals’.

It paints a very stark picture for Nigeria:

- Nigeria is ranked 150th out of 156 in achieving the SDGs !!!!
- It assesses Nigeria’s performance by Indicator for each Goal
- In relation to SDG 1 – Ending Global Poverty, Nigeria itself – one country alone - is responsible for 19 % of the total World gap in meeting this Goal
- Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Denmark and Finland - lead the SDG Index table, already achieving about 85 % of all 17 Goals

Other reports have been produced that give the SDG Index for Africa as a whole, and there is even an SDG Centre for Africa based in Rwanda.

There are also colour-coded graphs that show how all the 17 SDG Goals are being implemented by a range of countries and regions. For example for West Africa and the major regions.

Let me come to my challenge.

My challenge to this University, the Vice Chancellor, the staff, the students, the students' parents and families is this:

'Can you make this University a true Pioneer, a Champion for the SDGs in this country, and indeed on the African Continent?'

Can Igbinedion University, Okada State become a Centre of Excellence for the implementation of the SDGs? I know Lawrence has the Vision and Leadership qualities to initiate and pursue such a process. It is not for nothing that he is the President of the Nigerian Environment Society and a leading academic on environmental subjects.

The challenge, as I set out above, is immense. All Nigerian institutions have to rally their forces to help pull Nigeria up the SDG Index ladder.

Universities are traditional leaders of Education, Research and Training. They can be a source of inspiration and leadership that spreads way beyond the physical boundaries of the University. No other institution can perform this role.

What could it look like, over, say a 6 month period, in time perhaps for a presentation of the findings at the UN High

Level Political Forum in New York in July 2019 by the Nigerian authorities.

And this is a Special Forum – it will be devoted for the first time to assess the implementation of SDG 4 Education.

Some suggested steps could include:

1. Taking a formal decision in the Management body of Igbinedion University to undertake a total review of the way in which it addresses the SDGs
2. Setting up a public information campaign within the University on the SDGs.
3. Creating a special SDG Department within the University to promote research, education and learning on the SDGs.
4. Establishing an internal University website on the SDGs to collect views, exchange ideas, seek real engagement from the students and their families
5. Prioritise if appropriate which SDGs the University wishes to tackle.
6. Creating a small number of internal Working Groups within the University to look at, for example : a) Measuring the Ecological Footprint of the University and a regular monitoring process; b) Identifying ways in which the campus can reduce its impact on the environment – reduction of the use of energy from fossil fuels, water, food; c) Transportation to and from the campus; d) Lifestyles both on campus and at home; e) Outreach between the University, local schools and municipal authorities; f) Links with other Universities in Nigeria, the African continent and elsewhere who wish to conduct a similar process; f) Establishing a budget and defining staff responsibilities to make it happen; d) Set internal targets, review and report on them in time for the HLPF SDG meeting on SDG 4 Education in New York in July 2019

CHALLENGING – YES.
MOTIVATING – YES
EXCITING – YES.
INNOVATIVE – YES
LIFE-CHANGING - YES

Can it be done ? Is there the political courage and willingness to truly 'Make a Difference' ?

Ladies and Gentlemen, my apologies for the rather provocative nature of this Convocation presentation.

I cannot imagine that is the norm.

But I truly believe that we are all confronted by a massive challenge.

Nigeria is the most Populous, the most Innovative, the most Dynamic country in Africa. Can Nigeria take a lead on the SDGs ?

I leave you with two Nigerian proverbs:

'It's from a small seed that the giant Iroko tree has its beginning'

and a Yoruba proverb, whose central message is FOCUS:

'A person who pursues two rats will miss both...'

Thank you very much

Tim Clarke
14th November 2018