

Communiqué: AWAU 8th Conference and 10th Annual General Meeting

This communiqué was issued by the Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU) at the end of the 8th Conference and 10th Annual General Meeting held between 18th and 22nd January, 2023 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Center, The Gambia.

1.0 Preamble

The 8th Conference and 10th Annual General Meeting of the Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU) with the theme “**Repositioning Higher Education in West Africa for the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities**” was apt, strategic and timely. Following the keynote address - *Repositioning Higher Education in West Africa for The 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities* by Yakubu Ochefu, the Secretary General of the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU), the conference was declared opened by the honourable Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Pierre Gomez, ably represented by Mr. Dabo, The Deputy Permanent Secretary, Technical, at the Ministry of Higher Education, The Gambia who observed that higher education is being challenged economically, politically, socioeconomically also emphasized that higher education is indispensable in the regional development plans and agenda. He further submitted that the academia and policy makers must unite together to foster the desired regional development. The entire AWAU – 2023 participants mourned and observed a minute silence for the soul of the late Vice President of The Republic of The Gambia, His Excellency, Dr. Badara Joof, who passed away just a day before the commencement of the conference. May his soul continue to rest in peace!

Participants Spread

About 68 participants from six countries which include The Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, United Kingdom and Mali were well represented at the conference. Some important dignitaries that participated and greeted the event with their goodwill messages include the Vice Chancellor of the University of The Gambia, Prof Herbert Robinson; The Executive Secretary, National Universities Commission (NUC), Nigeria represented by Prof. Abdullahi Yusufu Ribadu (visiting Professor, NUC, Abuja); The Executive Secretary of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Nigeria, Prof. I.O. Oloyede; The Secretary General, Association of Africa Universities (AAU), Prof. Olusola Oyewole; Vice Chancellors from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria (Prof. Egbewole Wahab, SAN); Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA), Prof. T.O. Oladiji; University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria (Prof. Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah); University of Cape Coast, Ghana, Prof. Johnson Nyarko Boampong; Taraba State University, Taraba, Prof. Sunday Paul Bako; Nigerian Army University, Biu, Prof. Kyari Mohammed; Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria, Mr. Emmanuel Fanu (Registrar, LASU); Sule Lamido University, Kafin Hausa, Prof Lawan Sani Taura; Jigawa State; Osun State University Osogbo; Delta State University, Abraka, Al-Qalam University Katsina and some ex-VCs. *Inter alia*, participants from the region were drawn from diverse institutions and parastatals which include University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria, University of Gambia, Gambia; Delta State University, Abraka; University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria; University of Cape Coast, Ghana, Ghana; Ekiti State

University, Ado, Nigeria; University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria; University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; Bingham University, Abuja, Nigeria; Kogi State University, Lokoja, Nigeria, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria, NUC, Nigeria; JAMB, Nigeria; Nigeria High Commission, The Gambia; Standard Newspaper, The Gambia; The Voice Newspaper, The Gambia; Foraya Newspaper, The Gambia; GRTS (Reporter), The Gambia; QTV, The Gambia and others.

Conference Sub-themes

The sub-themes covered in the conference included

- i. i. Global Research Perspectives
- ii. ii. Partnerships, Collaborations and Inter-university Linkages
- iii. iii. Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development
- iv. iv. University Research and Development

Paper presenters addressed issues bothering on Innovative Curriculum Development; Internationalization of University Education for Enhanced Relevance, Productivity and Ranking; Alumni Contribution to Universities' Development and Advancement; University-Industry Relationship; University Research Translation; Capacity Development for the Technology era; Insecurity Issues on Campuses, Industrialization; Effects of Language and Immigration on Industrial Growth; and Governance and Policy Issues. The representative of the Association of Commonwealth University (ACU), Mr. Adeniyi, Emmanuel, the ACU Membership Engagement Coordinator for Africa emphasized the need for West African member institutions to pursue some of the most prestigious scholarships and grants available for their students and faculties on the ACU platform.

2.0 Important Observations and Submissions

The conference observed the following:

1. Many institutions in West Africa run solo-researches that impair rapid growth.
2. The vitiation of resources and subvention for running the institutions has apparently dwindled. Hence, universities management must devise means of sustainability.
3. There is a virtual disconnect between the Anglophone and Francophone countries in the sub-region.
4. AWAU recalled low participation from the Francophone countries.
5. The West African sub-region has enough resources to mitigate their local challenges.
6. Universities, as a miniature of the society cannot thrive in isolation. Hence, there is a need for trans-sector interaction and collaborations.
7. There is poor mentoring of young academics which made many young researchers to lose focus.
8. The issues of climate change is not well understood by many and not rigorously pursued by many institutions
9. The conference calls on the universities' to re-design curriculum that enhances graduate self-dependency, entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. This is imperative in order not to undermine quality education in the modern world.

10. Some programmes being run in many institutions are no longer adequate in preparing graduates for the rapidly evolving and emerging technology age.
11. Many researches in West African Institutions are fashioned to address global issue and global institution ranking neglecting local and relevant challenges.
12. Access to grants seems to be diminishing due to bad reputation incurred by previous grantees in West African institutions.
13. There is a serious discord in the interaction between Policy-Makers and Universities.
14. Conflict is inevitable everywhere, however, each intra- and inter-regional conflict must be channelled to progress.
15. The post COVID-19 pandemic era still take its toils on the progress of the West African Universities.

3.0 Imperative Recommendations

Following fruitful deliberations at the AWAU – 2023, it is imperative to reiterate that in order to effectively re-position higher education in West Africa for the 21st century, the following recommendations are inevitable.

1. The conference calls on the universities to establish and deepen intra-region collaborations for rapid regional advancement.
2. The conference calls on the universities' management to of necessity devise means of fund generation such as running of local campus businesses and commercialisation of ethical research products. There must be dedicated re-investment in entrepreneurship and profitable enterprising. As there are numerous waste-to-wealth resources such as in nutricosmeceuticals, nanotechnology, natural resources and other indigenous knowledge that could be invested into and commercialised, there must aggressive drive to attain this and further sustain university autonomy as enshrined in most institutions.
3. The conference calls on AWAU to foster better interactions between the Anglophone and Francophone speaking countries through direct engagements, meetings among others.
4. The conference calls on the government to re-focus and mobilise more funds to address sub-region peculiarities and challenges such as health and food crises.
5. The conference calls on the sub-region must meticulously harness their natural resources for regional solutions.
6. The conference calls on the West African governments and the institutions to be committed to the proper mentoring of young academics must be prioritised via structured programmes, incentives and engagement that prevents brain drain.
7. The conference calls on West African Universities' management to clearly spell out the measurable goals with strict periodic evaluation for all researchers
8. The conference calls on West African Universities' management to provide unrestricted access to basic research tools and facilities such as the Internet, and computers among others for all staff and students.
9. Innovations that attempt to solve indigenous challenges must be factored into researches emanating from the regions.

10. The conference calls on West African Universities' to promptly embrace hybrid teaching where possible as part of the post-COVID-19 realities.

4.0 General Assembly

The General Assembly elected the 4th executive committee members as follows:

1. **Chairman:** Professor Johnson Nyarko Boampong, VC, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
2. **Vice Chairman (Anglophone):** Professor Herbert Robinson, VC, University of The Gambia, The Gambia
3. **Secretary General:** Prof Wahab Egbewole (SAN), VC University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
4. **Financial Secretary:** -Prof Akeem Lasisi

The general and financial reports were read and subsequently adopted by the AGM

5.0 Conclusion and Appreciations

AWAU via its Chairman, Prof. Abdullahi Bala, appreciates His Excellency the Gambian Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, University of The Gambia, the Government and the good people of The Gambia, for their hospitality and magnanimous support/partnership for hosting the strategic 8th Conference and 10th Annual General Meeting of AWAU. All the participants including the entire LOC members, registration officers, security agents, drivers, partners, supporters, presenters, distinguished guests and participants who contributed to the success of the conference are immensely acknowledged and appreciated.

5.0 Communiqué Committee

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| 1. Dr. Atolani, Olubunmi | - | Chairman |
| 2. Dr. Tengya, Frank Pomak | - | Member |
| 3. Dr. Zubair, Abdulhakeem | - | Member |

Signed:

Prof Abdullahi, Bala (AWAU, Chairman)

Prof. Abdulkadir, Muhammed (AWAU, Secretary General)

Prof. Oladiji, Temidayo Adenike (AWAU, Director of Administration)