

# Federal University Lafia

## Address by Vice Chancellor, Professor Ekanem Ikpi Braide, at the First Convocation, January 9, 2016.

With a smile in my mind and on behalf of Federal University Lafia community, I welcome you all to this historic event, the first Convocation of the University. We are greatly honoured to have all stakeholders and friends of the University with us today.

When Federal University Lafia was established by the Federal government in 2011, along with eight other new Universities, we were given the mandate to increase access to, and improve quality of, education in our regions.

With this mandate it was clear from the beginning that we had had a big task ahead of us. We needed, and developed, a strategic plan to guide our activities as we set out on *the journey*. Our **vision to be a renowned institution of learning, research and innovation for positive socio-economic transformation of the nation**, fueled our determination to maintain high standards in all our operations guided by minimum standards set by the National Universities Commission (NUC). This determination was based on our **philosophy that education has to be of the right quality and scope to impact positively on development**. It was therefore apt for us to select ***Integrity, innovation, excellence*** as our **core values**. Since then we have been on a **mission of training of graduates and equipping them with skills for socio-economic development**.

The beginning for us was *starting from scratch* and we cannot forget this. How can we forget that at one point the registrar and I were the only staff of the University. The registrar's personal vehicle served as official vehicle and store for our documents. We remember, and remain grateful for, the take- of- grant given us by TETFund through the kind advocacy of NUC and Federal Ministry of Education who competently midwived the nine new Universities.

We remember the assistance we received in NUC as we utilized improvised office space provided by Professor Okojie, Executive Secretary NUC, Professor Mafiana and other staff of NUC. I am sure my colleagues *the new nine* still remember the

numerous preparatory meetings, briefings and trainings in Abuja. Sometimes we received notice of a new meeting on our way back from the last meeting halfway into our journey back home and had to turn and head to Abuja. We remember the enquiries, clarifications, courtesy visits, advocacy visits, consultations, peer meetings and planning meetings.

We remember the numerous meetings of Committee of Vice Chancellors and Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, where often times, some of the issues discussed did not apply to us *the new nine* because we were too new! We cannot forget the valuable assistance we received from some of our colleagues in older Universities who spent days with us in Abuja to put together our academic brief and other documents required for take- off.

I remember the Registrar and I being brought to Lafia by the Hon Minister of Education and Executive Secretary NUC for introduction to Governor Akwe Doma and his Cabinet. Later, another visit was made to hand us over to Governor Al Makura. We cannot forget the warm reception we received from Nasarawa State Government on both occasions.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, if I forget everything else, I will always remember that the big tree ( at the corner of the car park), now labelled *Ficus benjamina* by Botany department once served as office for the Registrar and I. The Dean of Science, a Professor of Botany has informed me that the common name of this tree is *weeping fig tree*. The Registrar and I shared one plastic table in this under- the- tree office but we had no cause to weep because we received unprecedented cooperation from our Mararaba Akunza host communities. Youths from the communities were mobilized to clear and clean this site. We were surprised and elated when, one day during this period , we saw Governor Tanko Almakura drive himself into this site to check on the progress of work. We received him from our office under the tree. The Emir of Lafia also visited us on site during this period.

While preparing the take- off site for occupation, we set up office in a four bedroom bungalow provided by the Nasarawa State Government.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen this journey has been tasking but interesting and fulfilling. There were challenges but we saw in the challenges opportunities for

valuable learning. The difficult times strengthened our strategic thinking skills and became opportunities for us to continuously raise our bar. The difficult times also taught us innovative prudence in resource management which we have locally named *financial engineering*. What helped us was that we consistently kept our eyes on our mandate and core values.

Today, as is visible, this take-off site has been built up. Movement to our permanent site has commenced and will soon be concluded. Federal Government (through various initiatives) and TETFund (through normal and special allocations) provided funding for construction of 15 no physical structures on the take off site and the permanent site. Nine (9 no) of these structures have been commissioned yesterday and today and eleven others are at various stages of completion.

Nasarawa State Government, apart from providing this take off site and a 206 hectares permanent site, donated the main building on this site, one hostel for female students on the permanent site, one lodge for the Vice Chancellor, one lodge for the Registrar and a guest house for the University. Nasarawa State Government has also anticipatorily committed to donating a teaching hospital when the proposed Medical School is ready for take- off. The state Government has also consistently provided bursary support for all Nasarawa State indigenes in the University.

Funds for furnishing, equipment, teaching/ learning materials have been provided by Federal Government , Federal MDAs and TETFund. In fact there is so much TETFund presence in this University that we are tempted to rename the University *TETFund University*. We will forever remain grateful to all these stakeholders who have contributed to the growth of this University.

These provisions and the extraordinary dedication of staff of the University , who have worked tirelessly, many times beyond the call of duty, have made it possible for us to successfully carry out top class teaching, research and community service. The quality of our teaching will be reflected in the quality of graduates we produce beginning from the set graduating today. The number of prizes we have won in competitions organized by NUC, Federal Government and other agencies reflect our commitment to providing evidence based solutions to socio economic problems in our immediate environment and in our nation. The impact of our community service initiatives is already evident in our host communities.

## **How have we performed with regards to our mandate?**

With regards to **access**, Federal University Lafia has provided opportunity for more youths, particularly from this region to acquire University education without encountering proximity related problems. We have also promoted inclusiveness by providing facilities for differently-abled students to learn comfortably.

With regards to **quality**, the education we offer goes beyond academic instruction. We hold the philosophy that education has to be of the right quality and scope to impact positively on development. We therefore offer *education of the head, mind and hands*. Besides academic activities, our students are trained to improve on their life skills and acquire entrepreneurial skills. Beyond skills, we target the mindset in entrepreneurship trainings. We are confident that our graduates can compete with their peers globally. They are employable and can be employers of labour.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, one of the deliverables of our mandate is the subject of our celebration today. It is my pleasure to introduce to you 119 well trained pioneer graduands of Federal University Lafia ; 26 from the Faculty of Arts, 28 from Faculty of Science and 65 from Faculty of Social Sciences. It is pleasing to note that of the 119 graduands, 66 are indigenes of Nasarawa State and of the 6 graduating in first class, 4 are Nasarawa State indigenes. Among the 119 are 84 males and 35 females. We are glad that our policy of inclusiveness has made it possible for us to produce one visually impaired graduand for whom all needed learning materials and facilities were provided.

At this point I, on behalf of Federal University Lafia community, congratulate you the graduands for successfully completing your various programmes. Today, you are celebrating all you have done and become. We commend your family and friends for supporting you through the period of your study. Of course you would not have gotten to this stage without the guidance, support and mentorship of your teachers and other University officials. The best way to thank them would be to continue to live a life of dignity and meaning. To do this, you must have the courage to surmount no matter the challenges you face in future. Be true to yourself and stay on the path that will help you achieve your true calling. The future is yours and your success depends on what you do with it. Always remember that your education is useful only if you can apply it to solving the world's problems and impacting on peoples lives. Please

connect with one another, keep in touch with FULafia and never stop learning as you enter the next phase of your career.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen I thank you for your support and presence at this occasion. I wish you all safe journey back home.

God bless you all and thank you for listening.