COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE SCHOOL OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC OKO, ANAMBRA STATE

Preamble

The School of Information Technology, Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra State held its first International e-conference on August 25-26, 2020. The conference had its theme: **Meeting the challenges of sustainable development** with subthemes carved out to discuss the relatedness of the theme. The conference was convened to enable the academia, scientists, governments, institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders, within and outside the country come together to discuss and share ideas on the best way to meet the challenges of sustainable development.

The conference was chaired by the Rector, Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra State, Dr Francisca Unoma Nwafulugo. The Dean School of Information Technology, Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Dr Onyeka Uwakwe gave a welcome address. Dr Christopher I. Ochonogor, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt delivered the first lead paper on a topic "Meeting the challenges of sustainable Development through Communication". Mr Kossy Ebunilo presented the second lead paper on the topic "E-Learning, Coronavirus Pandemic and Polytechnic Education in Nigeria: The way forward." Part of the top articles came from Dr Vincent Chukwukadibia Onwughalu, a lecturer in the Department of Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic Oko and Research Fellow with Department of Political Studies and International Relations, North West University, South Africa. Dr Onwughalu delivered a paper titled "Containing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: A Reflection on Government Actions and Citizens Reactions."

Observations

In the course of deliberations, participants at the conference made the following observations:

1. Sustainable national development has not been won in Nigeria because, despite the decades of rolling out development plans, the country is still struggling with meeting

the basic development needs of the populace. Communication has been identified as a prime mover in the realisation of development objectives

2. While some institutions in Nigeria have facilities and potentials to enable online education, some institutions still have difficulties in embracing such innovation because of financial constrains, lack of equipment, and Technophobia.

3. E-learning has helped in the continuation of education programmes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were shut down. It will also continue to play critical roles in enhancing the growth of education and meeting sustainable development in Nigeria.

4. It was the conviction of the participants that Internet of Things (IoT) which is an emerging technology should be put in the fore of discussion and consideration in the National Assembly of Nigeria, as people are projected to live in a smart community on or before 2040.

5. Participants noted that e-learning had been adopted reasonably in the western world and those tremendous developments recorded have been enhanced by free regime wifi internet facilities in such countries.

6. Participants were convinced that Ntigerian scholars are yet to take full advantage of libraries and software that aid writing and that many authors have their works tuck away in private shelves without publishing online and thus have very low online visibility.

7. Participants argued that the secrecy with which government agencies manage COVID-19 might lead to secret manipulations and sensitisation and medical reach in the villages are still minimal.

8. Participants noted the very low synergy between academic intuitions and the industry in Nigeria asserting that no sustainable development can take place in such a situation.

9. Unemployment, armed banditry and social insecurity.

10. IPPIS and unresolved issues affecting the welfare of staff of tertiary institutions.

11. Participants lauded the innovativeness of the School of Information Technology led by Dean, Dr Onyeka Uwakwe. Conferees agreed that the conference created a great window in the management of academic conferences and seminars in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In consideration of the observations made by the participants, the following recommendations were arrived at:

1. Conferees conclude that sustainable development is achievable if the people become active participants in communication and information management which give individuals a sense of belonging and self-worth. Participants in line with the lead speaker recommend, among others, that development facilitators should evolve a communication mechanism that encourages collective decision making possible for the attainment of sustainable national development. Participants thus recommend horizontal, rather than vertical communication in the society since the top-down form of communication seems to alienate the masses, the targets of development-oriented communication from the continuum.

2. Participants agreed that governments and ICT Stakeholders should develop a synergy to help sponsor ICT projects. This effort will include installations and training of Staff of all Institutions so as to give room for acceptability of this innovation. Tertiary institutions across the country should put strong and efficient machinery for health protective measures in force to ensure smooth resumption after the COVID-19 pandemic break.

3. Development of ICT infrastructure, formulation of ICT programmes, organising in-service staff trainings on ICT and institutional curriculum reforms will create room for the relaxation from Technophobia. Conferees urge authorities to develop synergies with academic to staff of tertiary institutions in order to find the best workable measures to adopting e-learning during pandemic and similar situations.

4. The National Assembly, academics and the industry should begin to develop robust discussions relating to the Internet of Things so that Nigeria will not be left behind as other parts of the world develop technologically.

5. Free access to the internet has contributed to easy communication, information sharing and implementation of educational programmes via online means. Accordingly the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) should work with

Internet Service Providers (ISPs), like MTN, GLO, AIRTEL to reduce data rates. This will help those who want to engage in smart agriculture to access the network from remote areas and at an affordable rate.

6. Plagiarism matters were raised and extensively discussed. Conferees urged authorities of institutions of higher learning to subscribe for paid versions of plagiarism and other academic software and resources as a means of uplifting standards of education for sustainable development. Authorities of Nigerian tertiary institutions should strengthen their libraries to global standards in order to meet international best practices in library usage.

7. On this, the participants made a case for more openness in the management of COVID-19. Participants also called for a more decentralised COVID-19 management regime to help rural dwellers. While commending NCDC, the audience called for COCID-19 sensitisation and awareness, participants called for spread to rural areas and not only in towns or cities.

8. Conferees urged academic staff to share their knowledge through conferences and journals. The participants urged educational institutions to invite industry players to conferences. Discussants urged industrialists to collaborate with higher institutions of learning in order to meet the goals of sustainable development in 2030.

9. Government should step up her approaches to Social Investment programmes in the country in order to engage the teeming youths in meaning ventures.

10. Participants urge the Federal Government to quickly resolve all issues relating to IPPIS as they affect the welfare of staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

11. The Dean announced that the e-conference would hold at least once annually as recommended by participants.

Dr. Onyeka Uwakwe   Otuu Obinna Ogbonnia

Chairman   Secretary