

FOUR YEARS OF PROFESSOR EGWUNYENGA AT DELSU BY BEN NWANNE

Four years in the saddle as the Vice-Chancellor of Delta State University, Abraka, (DELSU), Professor Andy Egwunyenga has amply demonstrated to be a confluence for justice, hard work, propriety, discipline and due process. His initial pledge to redress genuine cases of injustice still resonates with the University till this day.

On his first working day in office, Monday, December 2, as the 7th substantive Vice-Chancellor among others, he made a clarion call through a special edition of the DELSU Bulletin to the academic community to “unite as a community of scholars and administrators to collectively lift up Delta State University.” “In that momentous ice breaking communication, the new Vice-Chancellor declared.” I solemnly pledge to lead, inspire and advance the repositioning of Delta State University to emerge as the best State University in Nigeria. To realize this vision, we have a lot of work to do!”

In the past 48 months, Professor Egwunyenga has irrevocably been committed to the transformation of the University in different spheres, using his six-point agenda of building an effective and motivated work force, pursuit of innovation using ICT, strengthening faculties, departments and units, emphasis on the welfare of students, improvement of the revenue base and applying a new approach to University administration has provided a road map for the people-centered administration to post massive achievements, despite its lean resources.

Indeed, appreciating the people-factor early in his administration has been a success factor as no leader can do everything all by himself. He therefore embarked on bringing back to the fold those who had been frustrated and alienated from the system, due to various forms of injustice meted out to them. He provided an explanation in a recent Lead Interview published in the DELSU News of April 2022. “We have affected the lives of staff who were

depressed by the grievances of either victimization or injustice or things that happened against management of people,” he said. “So we have healed wounds, we have united staff and we have attempted to get everybody on board.”

If we were to borrow from the discipline of advertising, it is reasonable to state that the ‘unique selling point’ of the Professor Egwunyenga administration is his anchor on people, the ‘ant mentality’ which leverages on the power of a group to achieve its aims and objectives. “I think that the vision that I came with and the mission to advance the position of the University has, in fact, been taken over by staff without pushing or forcing them to do what is required,” he declared in the same edition of the same magazine.

Professor Egwunyenga’s power of persuasion, credibility, and get-things-done disposition has worked wonderfully for him. He is not an arm-chair administrator who dreads the scorching sun! On the contrary, he is always out there in the field to see things for him, making observations, suggestions and where necessary, giving instructions and directives and insisting that they are carried out. He always goes for on-the-spot assessments of projects. Some of the many projects he has delivered included beautification, renovation and landscaping of Site II and Site III Main Entrance gates, ongoing construction and furnishing of offices and lecture theatres for the Department of Nursing, Abraka, Faculty of Pharmacy Complex, Construction of Educational Technology Laboratory, on-going maintenance project of the 1000 capacity and 750 (A, B and C) lecture halls in Abraka and also the very huge edifice of Faculty of Management Sciences, funded from internally generated revenue. Other projects, funded by TETFUND and Delta State Government, are nearing completion as the University helmsman has assured that all would be delivered before leaving office on November 30, 2024.

One of the bold steps taken by the administration was the conversion of non-teaching staff to academic staff. It instantly became a source of motivation

for many who had worked hard to improve their academic qualifications with the hope of joining the academia. It was a win-win for the parties involved as it addressed, in a creative and realistic manner, the high under-staffing among the academic staff. The strengthening of academic staff definitely has a salutary effect on staff –student ratio which is abysmally poor in Nigeria. It is thought also to increase the University’s citations as more academics are involved in research, thereby improving the University’s rankings which have been on the upswing in the past four years.

Indeed, DELSU under Professor Egwunyenga administration has made tremendous progress in this regard. Addressing a Press Conference in April 2023 during the last Convocation, Professor Egwunyenga informed the audience, thus:“In the latest global ranking of Universities by Alper –Doger Scientific Index, Delta State University was ranked as the 27th best University in Nigeria among the over 200 Universities in the country and the 4th best among State Government-owned Universities. Further analysis of the ranking showed the University to be the best State University in the South-South and South Eastern parts of Nigeria.

“Furthermore, another highly recognized global Universities ranking body, Webometrics, in their own latest rankings, placed the University as 194th out of 2087 Universities in Africa and 24th out of over 200 universities in Nigeria, based on verified Google Scholar citations. According to the ranking, Delta State University recorded 56,443 citations, beating some highly rated Universities in United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Turkey, Portugal, Canada and some other more advanced Countries. This again is consistent with the Alper-Doger Scientific Index ranking that earlier placed the University as the 27th best in the Country.” This is not particularly surprising, given the expansion of academic programmes as over 87 programmes including Medicine and Surgery with an increase to 120 admission quota, have been given full accreditation status by the National Universities Commission

The Professor of Parasitology and Public Health is leaving no stone unturned in developing DELSU, growing the population from about 19,000 to over 35,000 and giving all segments of the University community a sense of belonging. The women folk have particularly benefited from his broad-mindedness which has seen a phenomenal growth of women at the commending height of the administration, rising from just one woman among the seven Principal Officers of the University to a whooping four! His argument for gender balance is excitingly persuasive. “Any society that does not harness the potentials of women is operating less than 50 percent capacity. By so doing, you have removed the other half, which is a kind of discrimination. It is wrong to look down on any one because of gender.”

In fact, in order to properly internalize and domesticate the ideals of gender balancing, the University is strengthening its Directorate of Gender and Development Studies which recently held a successful seminar for Directors of Gender Studies in Nigerian Universities. Also put in place are several policies to educate and inform the University Community on the proper and acceptable manner of conduct in different areas of human endeavours and also to reduce human subjectivity in interpreting issues. To this end, the University has, in the period under review, ‘enacted’ the gender policy, sexual harassment policy, plagiarism policy, safety policy, copyright policy and research and innovation policy.

According to the good book – the **Bible**- no one should light a candle and put it under the bed, hence the activities of the Professor Egwunyenga administration have been in the public domain, with encouraging reactions. It is amazing that his credibility rating from the very first day in office has to this day remained encouragingly high. As Editor-in-chief of DELSU News, this writer had commented on his performance and the inflow of awards and recognitions for the University and its chief executive officer in these words: “Given the transparency, high standard in scholarship, prudence and adherence to due process by the Professor Egwunyenga leadership, many persons in the country, and outside, are watching and applauding. Within the

past 18 months awards, commendations and honourable mention have come the way of the Professor of Parasitology and Public Health”. It is germane to mention a few of such awards to include: PAN African Prize for Excellence, Global Hope and Justice Award of Excellence, Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigeria Universities (AVCNU) Award of Recognition for Contribution to Development of the Eaglespan Plagiarism detection software, Award of Excellence as one of the 10 Most Outstanding Vice-Chancellors in Nigeria by Vanguard Press, Environmental sustainability Award by the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, SSANU, DELSU Branch and recently, the Grand Patron of Student’s Union of Delta State University, Abraka. The new President of the Students Union, Mr. Mathias Jimson, in a recent interview praised the Vice-Chancellor for “his diplomatic nature and his willingness to engage with the Union peacefully.”

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