

Communique

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF A TWO-WEEK SUMMER INSTITUTE ORGANIZED BY THE IFE INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES("OAU"), HELD ON JULY 24 – AUGUST 4, 2017, AT OAU, ILE, IFE, NIGERIA.

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Advanced Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife held its first Summer Institute on 24th July – August 5th 2017. The theme of the Summer Institute Program was *“The Knowledge Society and the Challenges of Doing Research in Africa: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Approaches.* “The Program was aimed at encouraging the participation of senior and junior scholars in interdisciplinary research in various areas of knowledge and providing them with access to a strong infrastructure to carry on important research. Furthermore, the Program was aimed at fostering deliberations about how to shape the country’s future, and establishing a network of non-university intellectuals, Nigerian and African society thought-leaders and civil servants.

The Program was anchored by an impressive number of senior scholars from Nigeria and abroad engaging a wide range of themes and issues that are designed to deepen the understanding of research and teaching mission in the academy. As facilitators and participants, these scholars led discussions on various conceptual, methodological and theoretical topics central to their various fields of interest, including tools of research in the fields of humanities and social sciences, networking techniques and ethical principles of the profession. They included Professors from the Departments of Religious Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, History, Linguistics and Literary Studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Gender Studies, drawn from Nigeria and the African Diaspora.

The opening ceremony of the summer Institute was attended by important dignitaries from across the country including the Acting President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo (represented by Dr. Adeyemi Dipeolu, Special Adviser to The Vice President on Economic Matters); the Ooni of Ife, His Imperial Majesty, Oba Enitan, Oguwusi, Ojaja II; the Vice Chancellor, Prof Temitope Ogunbodede, who was the Chief Host; faculty facilitators; and a group of twenty five pre-doctoral and doctoral fellows from South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, U.S.A. and Uganda.

The two-week intensive summer institute is the first program organized by the newly established Institute of Advance Studies located on the campus of the OAU. Bringing their expertise from various disciplinary backgrounds in the social sciences and the humanities, the professors conducted lectures on various themes focusing on advancing both theoretical and practical knowledge and issues underpinning their scholarship, research, teaching, and publication skills. They also facilitated workshops and panel discussions that either focused

on or explored many topical issues they considered significant or required for the academic knowledge or growth of the pre-doc and post doc fellows of the Institute's inaugural gathering. Among the topics covered are: - advancing humanistic and social science knowledge, gender, entrepreneurship, teaching skills, invigoration of research in Africa, interpreting oral and textual traditions, humanizing academics, the Art and Process of Academic Writing, among others. In addition, the faculty explored such critical and broad cross-and trans-disciplinary themes as religion, governance, leadership, politics, education, globalization and African development.

At the opening ceremony, the Acting President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, applauded the University for its support of the establishment of the Institute. He noted that the Institute will re-invigorate education in Ife, the cradle of civilization, and the symbol of serenity, tradition and progressive intellectual thought. He envisioned that the Institute would be a partnership among government, civil society and the academia for the purposes of cross-fertilization of ideas, which he hoped would help bring Nigeria back to its prior glory. He pledged his commitment to this initiative. Similarly, in his speech, the Ooni of Ife pledged his full and continuing support for the Institute and promised to assist in making sure that this vision is fully realized.

The Vice Chancellor remarked that the Institute's vision to nurture young academics aligns with the University's commitment to excellence in research and teaching. He pledged his full support to this noble initiative. In providing further clarification on the rationale for establishing the Institute, the Convener, Prof. Jacob Olupona, observed that the Institute will be an international center that draws excellent researchers and fellows from different parts of the world, similar to established traditions in other places such as China, Germany, Israel, Princeton, Harvard.

In the course of its deliberation, the Institute noted the following: -

1. THAT exposure to critical thinking is core to learning and excellent research in the University and that exploring strategies and innovative approaches that are the models of best practices of scholarship in other parts of the world re-energizes and re-invigorates the University.
2. THAT practical demonstration of theoretical insights is key to the learning process.
3. THAT encouraging multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and cross disciplinary engagement would help strengthen Social Sciences and Humanities and debunk negative assumptions about them.
4. THAT sustained attention to thinking about how Social Sciences and Humanities academics do their work sharpens the thinking of fellows and empowers scholars to make innovative contributions to their respective fields.
5. THAT interaction between junior and senior scholars results in the emergence of a non-hierarchical learning culture that promotes partnership, collegiality, mutual respect and a mentoring spirit between senior and junior scholars, mentors and mentees.

6. THAT reflecting on the challenges facing scholars in the academy in terms of environment, resources, infrastructure, and learning environment creates opportunities to innovate and reinvigorate the academy.
7. THAT networking and collaboration among scholars are critical to academic excellence and career success.
8. THAT theorizing on African epistemologies and applying the lessons learnt will change the direction of policy by ensuring that the policies are compatible with the social and political contexts in Nigeria, Africa and beyond.
9. THAT exposing young scholars to the craft of academic writing and publishing will empower them to overcome the challenges facing scholars in Africa.
10. THAT exposure to global academic cultures on teaching, writing, publishing, mentoring and leadership is critical to the success of the young academic.
11. THAT interaction with colleagues and scholars from other institutions challenges scholars to think globally and to see their local struggle as part of a broader global issue.
12. THAT the interaction between participants and faculty provided a networking opportunity for scholars from other institutions and other disciplines.
13. THAT the conversations provided an opportunity for participants to explore and nurture ongoing collaborative and individual research.

The participants envisioned that the Institute would:

1. Provide access to field research opportunities
2. Enable the establishment of life long partnerships, networks and mentoring relationships amongst participants and faculty members.
3. Provide networking opportunities for current and future participants, fellows and faculty advisers.
4. Create a comprehensive database of opportunities available for scholars. These opportunities include research funding, conference opportunities, publication opportunities, grant opportunities, job opportunities, consultancy opportunities etc.
5. Build capacity of the fellows by funding and enabling them to attend conferences and thereby be able to contribute to the future cohort of fellows at the Institute.

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

1. To generate wider publicity for the Institute through multiple forums.
2. To form a cohort of Fellows for each Summer Institute in order to ensure the cohesiveness of the group and continued collaboration.
3. To create a website that provides access to field research opportunities, doctoral and postdoctoral funding opportunities.
4. To provide networking opportunities for current and future participants, fellows and faculty advisers.

5. To create a comprehensive database of opportunities available for scholars. These opportunities include research funding, conference opportunities, publication opportunities, grant opportunities, job opportunities, consultancy opportunities etc. (Do we need to repeat this here in light of number 4 of the preceding section)
6. To build capacity of the Fellows by funding and enabling them to attend conferences and thereby be able to contribute to the future cohort of fellows at the Institute. (see no. 5 of the preceding section).

CONCLUSION

Congratulatory messages continue to stream in from many parts of the world with expressions of support, desire for partnership, and participation in future activities of the Institute. The participants were laudatory in their appreciation of the unique opportunities that this summer institute opened up for them. The facilitators commended the participants who came from different parts of the world for their enthusiasm and diligence during the two-week intensive summer training. They expressed their commitment to make this a regular event as this Institute grows. We agreed that the mentor and mentee relationships cultivated during this summer institute will be a permanent feature of the Institute of Advanced studies.