

Institute Emerged as the most prestigious and forward-thinking professional entrepreneurship body in Africa

EXCERPTS OF THE INTERVIEW WITH REGISTRAR/CE –ICENT (Olaolu Nuru Oyekola - Registrar/ Chief Executive, ICENT)

- ICENT is the Africa's most prestigious and forward-thinking professional entrepreneurship body

-asserts Nigerians prefer unaccredited degrees that offer employment to accredited degrees and charter status without employment

-faults the quality of entrepreneurship degrees run by some universities as substandard

-challenged Nigeria to establish separate university or college of entrepreneurship as well as separate entrepreneurship departments in tertiary institutions

-offers to give world-class curriculum development and accreditation support to NUC and NBTE if invited.

-decried the charter process of institutes in National assembly

In this explosive interview with Editorial team of Association of Entrepreneurs, the Registrar and Chief Executive of Institute of Classic Entrepreneurs (ICENT) – Nuru Oyekola opened up on many issues. He spoke on the state of the nation, the economy, unemployment, entrepreneurship education, poor legislation regarding charter status, the outstanding place of the Institute and her College in Africa and its membership, Governing Council and ICENT’s contributions to national development. Excerpts:

ET: Congratulations on your performance as the Registrar/Chief Executive of ICENT. Since you assumed office, how has it been and what has been your experience?

REG: It has really been wonderful. Though not without challenges, God has been faithful, we are moving forward.

ET: Sir, what is the meaning of classical entrepreneur?

REG : Not classical entrepreneur, it is classic entrepreneur - a classical entrepreneur is one who is concerned with the customer and marketing needs through the development of self-supporting venture. He is a stereo type entrepreneur whose aim is to maximise the economic returns at a level constant of the firm or without growth. On the other hand, classic entrepreneurship is an innovative idea that develops into a high-growth company like Microsoft, Netscape, and Amazon. Classic entrepreneur is a person who identifies a business opportunity and allocates available resources to tap that market. The institute is Institute of Classic Entrepreneurs (ICENT) with her training arm as College of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management (CESBUM)

ET: What informed the establishment of your institute?

REG : Poverty in Nigeria is massive, pervasive and chronic, engulfing a large proportion of the society. At the foundation of every conflict, there is a phenomenon called poverty. There is a unanimous view that adequate employment opportunities are lacking given that Nigeria's economic problems have seriously affected industrial growth, which could have eased the problem.

Unfortunately, while banks, companies and government are busy retrenching, tertiary institutions are busy producing more graduates, hence, it is very difficult to provide direct employment to such a vast youth population. According to Unemployment/Under-employment report published by National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's unemployment rate is unacceptable. The impact of dramatic rise in youth unemployment has created victims of desperateness, frustration and insecurity leading to the generation of socially unacceptable behaviour.

The best strategy therefore, is for tertiary institutions to have a paradigm shift from training potential job-seekers to breeding self-reliant and job creators. A great way to achieve this is through a well-structured entrepreneurship education, (well-structured underlined with great emphasis please) which must be encouraged with all the seriousness it deserves.

We have discovered that virtually all Nigerian tertiary institutions who proclaim they teach entrepreneurship, having produced electrical engineers who cannot fix bulb into lamp holder, chemical engineers who cannot produce liquid soap and mechanical engineers who cannot regulate generator, ignorantly or wickedly teach innocent students welding, carpentry, automobile repairs, radionics, soap making, GSM repairs etc, petty trading/small businesses in the name of Entrepreneurship, in gigantic multi-million entrepreneurship development centres, under the coordination of someone trained with millions as an entrepreneurship educator and not a mere vocational trainer.

It is quite unfortunate that while carpenter and petty-trader parents (for instance) blame their predicaments on lack of formal education, their wards are being taught welding and GSM repair by Nigerian entrepreneurship educators.

Despite the establishment of several entrepreneurship development/vocational centres in almost all Nigerian tertiary institutions, introductory entrepreneurship courses as compulsory for all undergraduates and Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department by NYSC, the continuous rise in the unemployment rate is a pointer to the fact that the existing strategies are defective.

ET: Are you accredited?

REG: By who?

ET: NUC or NBTE

REG: Why do we need accreditation?

ET: For recognition of your certificate

REG: Recognition by who?

ET: Government and employer

REG: Why do you want your certificate to be recognised by government?

ET: Sir, don't you think your certificate need to be recognised so that your members can be employed?

REG: Mind you, we are not training employees but employers; the issue of employers' recognition does not arise. The only employees among our students are corporate entrepreneurs. And intrapreneurs are the most sought-after in the world. On government recognition for employment, where is the employment?

ET : ----- kept quiet em em em

REG: Answer me, where is the job? Or prove to me that graduation from accredited university or membership of a chartered institute is a guarantee for employment.

REG: My brother, what you need in Nigeria today is "self-accreditation", just like some people can be bailed on self-recognition. You mean you have not been seeing first class and 2.1 graduates from UI, OAU, ABU, UNN and chartered accountants without job? Nigerians are tired of accredited programmes that cannot guarantee their self-reliance or financial independence. Given the unacceptable level of unemployment in our country, they have realised that the most accredited degree is the one that guarantees their self-reliance. Most Nigerians, unlike before, now agree that it is preferable to be self-reliant graduate of an unaccredited institution than unemployed graduate of accredited institution. This is because, people pay you for what you do with what you know and not what you claim you know. Contrary to widespread assertion, we at ICENT and CESBUMA believe Nigerian graduates are employable; they are only victims of wrongly structured curriculum.

Most Ph.D holders in Electrical Engineering cannot fix bulb into lamp holder while their Mechanical counterparts don't know what is responsible for the noisy sound of their generator. It is very stupid to claim that engineers are to design while technologists are to execute. The question is, must you design what you cannot execute? How do you control the process? The similitude is when a man separates fatherhood from being husband. A husband who cannot father a child is an impotent while a father that cannot play the role of husband is irresponsible husband. Our aim is to clean the unemployment mess created by accredited degrees that cannot guarantee employment. As a matter of fact, we are not training job-seekers but job-creators that need "self-accreditation/recognition" in order to proffer solution to the unemployment of graduates of accredited institutions.

REG: To answer your question, we don't even need NUC or NBTE accreditation, as a professional membership institute and neither university nor polytechnic. Rather, NUC and NBTE need our service during their accreditation exercise to achieve balanced and standard academic and professional accreditation.

ET : What of your College?

REG : Presently we are running professional programmes which can be accredited by our professional institute.

ET: Do you plan offering academic programmes in the nearest future?

REG: Yes we do

ET: Don't you think you need accreditation?

REG : Yes we do

ET: Have you been accredited?

REG: By who?

ET: NUC or NBTE depending on the kind of programmes you intend running

REG: Do you know what it takes a regulatory body to accredit a programme?

ET: They are to inspect your resources, curriculum, facilities, staff etc.

REG: Who is to inspect ?

ET: Accreditation team

REG: Do you know the composition and qualifications of accreditation team?

ET: I don't know sir

REG: That team is to be led by at least an Associate Professor having at least two of his degrees from that field, and a standard curriculum. Unfortunately, entrepreneurship education is in infancy in Nigeria, we are the one pioneering full-blown entrepreneurship education. I don't know how true it was, but someone told me the regulatory agencies of the Federal Ministry of Education (National Board for Technical Education and National University Commission) do not have the aforementioned requirements.

ET : How did he know ?

REG: I asked him same question and his response was shocking and challenging.

ET : How and why sir ?

REG: He emphasized that entrepreneurship is now the global phenomenon, more important than technology and agriculture. I was convinced on that, because, more than ever, we now need not even subsistence but transformational entrepreneurs in form of technopreneurs and agropreneurs. He asserted that NUC/NBTE are aware of this, no wonder they attached 50% to availability of entrepreneurship centres (and not school farm or engineering workshop) during accreditation exercise. My brother, entrepreneurship is as important as that. In his words in which he challenged Nigeria as a nation and NUC/NBTE as regulatory bodies "unfortunately, unlike technology and agriculture with universities and colleges in Nigeria as well as faculties in almost all Nigerian institutions of higher learning, Nigeria has no University or College of Entrepreneurship and no Nigerian polytechnic runs National Diploma or Higher National Diploma in Entrepreneurship like Kenya and no university runs world-class accredited B.Sc. in

Entrepreneurship”. He furthered “you can’t give what you don’t have, if they have standard entrepreneurship curriculum with competent accreditation team, by now all universities and polytechnics in Nigeria will be running ND/HND and B.Sc. in Entrepreneurship respectively.”

ET: But sir, some universities run B.Sc. in Entrepreneurship.

REG : Look! My brother with all due respect to the management of those universities, that is not entrepreneurship. It is at best entrepreneurship-flavoured business administration or management. You know if you squeeze one or two dried cat fish into vegetable, you will have fish-flavoured vegetable soup and not fish soup.

ET: Laughs ---please expatiate on the issue of flavour ----

REG : If a marketing student offers marketing communications (which is part of mass communication) as a course, is that enough to make him a journalist?

ET: No, far from it

REG: You know is far from it. Is a criminologist same as a professional lawyer?

ET: No Registrar.

REG: Can you call a mathematician an engineer because he made A in engineering mathematics?

ET: Though pre-requisite, the two are separate fields

REG: Take for instance, in the faculty of management, business management students offer business mathematics, business statistics, and quantitative techniques/analysis – no one awards them bachelor of mathematics. They must pass several economics courses- for B.Sc. Business Management and not B.Sc. Economics. To be good as a manager, you need to be a good marketer, hence, several marketing courses incorporated into B.Sc. Business Management curriculum. Notwithstanding, there is a separate department with separate curriculum for award of B.Sc. Marketing. What happened to Entrepreneurship? You just visit our website, under “ABOUT” and navigate “EXAMINATIONS OF THE INSTITUTE“ and conduct your independent research on whether those universities you have in mind offer those courses. To be frank with you, I think NUC/NBTE need our input for standard world-class curriculum development and accreditation for any entrepreneurship programme in Nigeria and as patriotic Nigerians, we will be glad to render service anytime they call.

ET: Why did you say so?

REG: Good. No any platform in African can provide all the requirements they need to do their regulatory job except ICENT.

ET: How do you mean?

ET: While we have about six (6) people who are more than qualified to lead accreditation team for entrepreneurship programme anywhere in the world, I doubt if NUC/NBTE has none. While we have curriculum and study pack in about 46 different core areas to match for running of certificate to doctorate programmes in Entrepreneurship, Small Business Management,

Technopreneurship, Agropreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, Corporate Entrepreneurship, Strategic entrepreneurship, International Entrepreneurship etc NUC/NBTE can only boast of curriculum/syllabus for Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Practice of Entrepreneurship. In our fellowship today we can boast of one (1) Professor of strategic management and entrepreneurship, Associate/Assistant Professors of entrepreneurship, and several Doctors of entrepreneurship including the first Doctor of Technopreneurship in Nigeria with several Professors and Doctors in different core areas of entrepreneurship including medical and pharmaceutical entrepreneurship. No entrepreneurship institute in Africa can boast of that.

ET: Whao! That is wonderful!

REG : Lest I forget to tell you that ICENT is the Africa's most prestigious and forward-thinking professional entrepreneurship body. Please help me tell National Assembly to take note.

ET: No doubt about that sir.

REG : To God be the glory

ET: Sir, I think the issue is accreditation is over. Are you chartered?

REG: Not yet

ET: Why not?

REG: We don't have the financial muscle to do that for now. And if I may ask you why do we need chartered status?

ET: For recognition

REG: Which recognition?

ET: Recognition of your membership certificate.

REG: We are recognised by law as a professional institute limited by guarantee under CAMA 1990 vide certificate NO RC 1119210 on 4th June 2013. Prior to this, ICENT is in receipt of an approval letter referenced FME/TED/A&E/ANPB/XXXIT/39 dated 19th April 2013 from the Evaluation and Accreditation Branch, Tertiary Education Department, Federal Ministry of Education and consent of the Attorney General of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Which other recognition are you insinuating?

ET: Recognition of your membership certificate for job, promotion, political appointments

REG: There you go again. Where is the job? Not to talk of promotion. Unemployment has been on the increase and we have been producing job creators. Visit our websites for our achievements. NIM became chartered in 2003 after about 40 years of existence. They have produced several VCs, Rectors, Provosts, Doctors, Professors, Generals, MD/CEO etc before 2003. Have you ever asked them how they got promoted?

ET: No

REG: Do you know that, there is a level you reach in lecturing career, that you need relevant professional qualification to get promoted, otherwise you remain stagnated.

ET: Yeah. I think from lecturer 1 to senior lecturer or so.

REG: There are several VCs and Professors of Agriculture, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture, Geography, History, Political Science, Zoology, Sociology. We have Agricultural Society of Nigeria, Fisheries Society of Nigeria, Zoological Society of Nigeria, I doubt if Geography, History, Sociology have at all, not to talk of status or no status. Please help me confirm their NUC/NBTE accreditation or charter status and how those intellectual ideologues became professors and VCs/Rectors/Provost. Also assist with your investigative journalism in confirming from NUC/NBTE how they have been accrediting management and marketing courses before NIM, NIMN and CIA became chartered and get back to me. The irony of the matter is that, those pre-accreditation members of NIM, NIMN, CIA are the one leading accreditation teams for NUC/NBTE today. Don't forget the analogue professors of yesterday were the ones who trained digital doctors of today.

ET: I will try my best sir.

REG: From the information available to me, most of the aforementioned professional associations, if not because of the caliber of members, are not better than association of carpenter, welders, bricklayers etc. If you doubt it, google search and tell me their examination structure from Foundation to Professional stage. They are mostly registered under part C (Incorporated Trustee) same way association, clubs and societies register with CAC.

ET: Serious!

REG: And you mentioned political appointment. The highest office in the land is Presidency. All you need to contest for that is O'level certificate. With two (2) passes WAEC or NECO will issue you certificate and you can contest and become President and not with charter status.

ET: Don't you think, charter status can give you the opportunity to regulate entrepreneurship?

REG: Point of correction, we are not interested in regulating entrepreneurship. I know those you are referring to. They want to regulate Dangote, Femi Otedola, Obasanjo – an Agropreneur, Tony Elumelu – social entrepreneur, Ifeanyi Ubah, Tinubu – a political entrepreneur. We want entrepreneurs – be it subsistence or transformational, to spring up everywhere. You don't regulate such. At ICENT, what we want to regulate is entrepreneurship education. Unfortunately, charter status is now for sale.

ET: How?

REG: Can someone regulate or control what he doesn't know?

ET: Impossible!

REG: You see we are in the era of knowledge economy, you cannot legislate ignorance into knowledge. Entrepreneurship is a profession and field of study just like Finance, Law and Medicine. Professional accountants, lawyers and medical practitioners are made on merit based on special training and not by legislation on the floor of national assembly. Some people in the

name of entrepreneurship went to National Assembly that they want charter status to regulate entrepreneurship practice in Nigeria. No single expert in the governing board, no examination structure not to talk of conduct of qualifying examination for members. No syllabus, no study pack. I know Speaker or Senate President would have used just one of these deficiencies to kill the matter and die on arrival if they seek alternative regulatory body for Law or Medicine respectively. The institute wants to give what they don't have. It is in Nigeria where there is no merit or standard for charter status. It got to a stage, the matter became laughing matter at senate to the extent that Senator Theodore Orji said, they will sponsor bill for the establishment of institute of chartered politicians. I am appealing to lawmakers to exhibit the same thoroughness as they do in ministerial screening to determine the eligibility of a professional institute for charter status. I know they will not descend so low to make a chemist an accountant general of the federation or political scientist an attorney general of the federation or quantity surveyor a health minister.

ET: Laughs--- Yes, I heard it

REG : Our objective is to produce professional, classic and successful entrepreneurs not only capable of establishing profitable ventures but also finding practical and pragmatic solutions to management, operational or strategic problems given the contemporary society characterized with high level of unemployment and scarcity. Our vision is to be the Africa's master brand in provision of entrepreneurship education for sustainable development. This we set to achieve by being a trailblazing provider of quality entrepreneurship education by raising its standard as the key to a more productive and sustainable development of Africans through globally acceptable best practices. None of these requires charter status or accreditation to achieve. Our achievements are online for you to check.

ET: You are right sir, but you know in Nigeria, we worship certificates so to say. Or let me say, Nigerians always need something as evidence of quality.

REG: You are right, while they are meant to serve as evidence of quality, they do not guarantee good quality in all cases. In Nigerian mentality, we are meant to believe that private universities are better than public universities and foreign universities are better than indigenous ones. I was shocked when one man landed in hospital because he trained his son in UK with over N15M, but the best job his son got was that of N35, 000 a month. The man fainted; perhaps, he took it as investment and calculated the payback period running to over 35years.

ET: Laughs, laughs, laughs

REG: Give any of our "unaccredited" students or "unchartered" members N3Million and see if he will not employ 3 people with better salary.

ET: Sir, we really appreciate your time. Your responses have been so educative and inspiring. I must confess that you have changed some of our perceptions on entrepreneurship. Thank you and God bless.

REG: You are most welcome!