

CSR Digest

ISSUE NO. 1, 2011



Prizes, Prestige, Pedigree



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foreword Taking Stock

What is not measurable can not be appraised, what is not appraised can not be improved! ... says management experts.

At Nigeria LNG Limited, we definitely share that view.

Seven years ago, when we called stakeholders together to that now famous town hall meeting in Lagos, to deliberate on Science and Literature, the only thing that was clear in our minds was that something needed to be done about the sorry standard of literature and the sciences and that we were ready to invest in reversing the situation. For an organisation that adopts excellence as its mantra, it was our corporate social responsibility. After several meetings, various suggestions advanced, some discarded, and others fine-tuned, we all reached an accord – it was expedient to find ways to hold up for emulation, scientists and writers and to bring their work to national light for our enhanced national development - as Literature and Science can only be relevant if they are supported to play their vital roles in the society. A major pillar of support for them will come through recognising and rewarding excellence in these fields.

And that gave birth to what our compatriots have now described as the biggest prizes in Africa.

Inaugurated in February 2004, The Nigeria Prize for Science and The Nigeria Prize for Literature have become annual fixtures in the calendar. These prizes have been well received by Nigerians both at home and abroad. Each of the prizes initially carried a cash value of \$20,000 but this has now been raised to \$100,000 and the Prize opened to Nigerian scientists and writers all over the world. It is definitely expected, as with all other prizes in the world, that the lives of these writers and scientists after winning the prize will change profoundly.

In this edition of *CSR Digest*, we bring the winners of the Prizes back to the stage.

We went back to them to take a measure, to find out how they have fared after becoming laureates.

Meet then our college of prize winners—10 men and women of the Nigeria Prize for Science and Nigeria Prize for Literature. Although 13 winners have emerged so far, Professor Ezenwa Ohaeto and Esiaba Irobi are no more with us. Unfortunately, we couldn't grab hold of Mabel Segun before we wrapped up this production in time to meet the printer's deadline. Let me say here that this edition of *CSR Digest*, though focused on the Prizes and past winners, is dedicated to everyone out there who has since the establishment of the prizes in 2004, most especially our collaborators who include the Nigerian Academy of Sciences (NAS), the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL), the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), writers, eminent scholars and literary critics. They have all played an immeasurable role in meeting the objective of the project.

Have a jolly good read.

Siene Allwell-Brown

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The Tradition Continues...

By Yemi Adeyemi, Elkanah Chawai & Boma Harry

Prizers are a powerful stimulation of creativity. No doubt, they push the human mind towards achieving more. There is that hope, no matter how little, that some day what is being done will be recognised. And that, sometimes, is all the fuel that creativity needs. History lends itself to this fact.

After reading his obituary in the newspapers – his brother died and a journalist thought he was the one - Alfred Nobel was inspired on what legacy he would leave when he died. This led him to change his Will, dedicate 94 percent of his entire estate (\$9 million at his death in 1896) to the establishment of prizes in areas dear to his heart. Nobel, in his last Will, directed that his fortune be used to create a series of prizes for those who confer the greatest benefit on mankind. With emphasis on benefits on mankind, the Nobel Prizes have advanced the study of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and promotion of world peace to better the lives of all humans on the surface of the earth. The benefits such prizes bring to the human race are invaluable and immeasurable.

The founders of the Man Booker Prize, another prize in the stock of the most important and prestigious, believed they could use the Prize as power to transform the fortunes of authors and even publishers, preserving a critical group of people who specialize in the expression, preservation and advancement of culture through language.

Another Prize, The Caine Prize, was inspired by the late Sir Michael Caine, former Chairman of Booker Plc and Chairman of the Booker Prize Management Committee. Before his death, he was working on an idea to grow global recognition for African writing. He recognised the richness, diversity and the unique storytelling tradition in the writing. Hence, the focus of the Prize was directed on the short story which reflects the contemporary development of that tradition.

In Africa, Nigeria LNG Limited established The Nigeria Prize for Science and The Nigeria Prize for Literature to help provide meaningful existence for Nigerians through the advancement of sciences and technology and salvaging of the nation's education system and the art of writing. In all of these, the recognition and the reward for excellence is the driving force for that creativity.

Case for the Prizes

In establishing The Nigeria Prize for Science and The Nigeria Prize for Literature, NLNG recognised that the Prizes are rewards for public good and for creative solutions to problems peculiar to our society.

In the case of The Nigeria Prize for Science, NLNG believed that science can only be relevant and beneficial to mankind if it is supported to play vital roles in the society.

The company aligned itself with experts who believe that greater recognition for scientists would drive the country to unravel the myths that tend to cripple development and provide leaders with answers to crucial issues such as food shortages, fuel shortages, electoral malpractice, poverty, health and environment—issues still burdening the third world. In the same vein, it was hoped that the prize would encourage leadership to take a science-based decision and bring about improvements in the general wellbeing of its citizenry and standards of living.

By instituting a significant science prize, NLNG hoped that the prize would bring science and scientists to public attention, save them from their current low rating in national estimation and bring them at par with their counterparts in developed countries.

For literature, the spotlight had dimmed on the art of writing and publishing, a platform on which a crop of African literary giants like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Mabel Segun, Chukwuemeka Ike and host of others emerged. A literary prize was a significant step towards recovery and bringing back the shine to literature and authorship. NLNG believed a good prize for literature would promote writing, literacy and good reading culture among Nigerians. The prize would rotate among four genres of literature—prose, poetry, drama and children's literature.

The Nigeria Prize for Science and The Nigeria Prize for Literature were inaugurated in 2003 and later registered as charities (companies limited by guarantee) with Corporate Affairs Commission. Agreements were signed with members of the science and literature community drawn from The Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS), The Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL), Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), publishers and the academia which was followed by the creation of advisory committees to administer the prizes. The Prizes were entrusted to NAS and eminent writers and scholars to assess the worth of scientific discoveries and contemporary works of literature and reward excellence.

Prize money

At the outset in 2004, the prize money was \$20, 000. Two years later, six prize winners had been produced and the stakes were raised. Dr Chris Haynes, who at that time was Managing Director of Nigeria LNG Limited, announced an increase of the prize money to \$30, 000. In the following year, 2007, the prize money was upped to \$50,000. In 2011, the eighth year of the Prize, the company raised the prize money to \$100,000.

The effect of this increase can be only imagined.

Prizes and Winners

Thirteen prize winners have emerged since inception. Two have passed on. They are Professor Ezenwa Ohaeto, who died a few months after his award in 2005, and Esiaba Irobi who died few months before his award in 2010. Others have lived with the fame of their remarkable works, improved on such works and even returned to compete for the prize again. But this is just part of their story.

In this edition of CSR Digest, we present the past and current winners of the coveted prizes. Share in their triumphs and trials as they strive to live up to their current billing as high achievers in our challenging environment. And as they brace up for greater success, their stories serve as eye openers to the real potential of the prizes.



Sages of Science

A close-up portrait of Akpoveta Susu, an elderly man with grey hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. He is looking slightly to the left with a gentle smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

From Engineering to Medicine

His mental alertness belies his age. At 70, Akpoveta Susu, a professor of chemical engineering, is still keen-minded, sharp of wits and flows with ideas on inventions and research papers like an eternal gush of spring water.

As co-winner of the first edition of The Nigeria Prize for Science in 2004, Susu, along with Kingsley Abhulimen (his doctoral student at the time) were awarded the Prize for their work *Real-Time Computer Assisted Leak Detection/Location Reporting and Inventory Loss Monitoring System*.

The strong-willed, high-spirited, ardent professor continues to research and teach at the Lagos State University. In this must read interview, he shares his experience and challenges of life after winning the Prize.

How much recognition has your 2004 Prize brought you?

I'm an old person and I'm used to awards. I went to Stanford University, one of the three best universities in the world and what I did there gave me prominence. Before the award, I was given the Nigerian National Merit Award which is the highest intellectual recognition for Nigerians, and it was quite satisfying when I got that. I'm a Fellow of all the academies of science and engineering. But I'll like to say that in Nigeria, we don't recognise excellence in anything; we recognise money (most accolades I get from my friends are that I built this house).

But NLNG came in and changed all of that. At the time we won it, we got \$20,000; the money wasn't anything to me but the thing is that you have won something that people recognise.

You co-invented a leak detection system that clinched the Prize. Tell us your role in the discovery.

I supervise students and I have 22 PhD graduates. I'm now at the Department of Chemical Engineering and Polymers of Lagos State University. I'm supervising six PhD students. In supervising students, you must know a lot more than they do so that you can tell them what to do and where to go. In a PhD degree, you are supposed to find something new; if you don't, then you don't get a degree. So, the supervisory part of it is a very important part because if you don't have a good supervisor, then you won't finish. My role in this is to first of all conceive problem you want to tackle and a student must come out with a solution to a problem. The supervisor's role is very crucial to the execution of the project and its ultimate success. That was the role I played in that discovery.

After your remarkable work, how far have you advanced towards a patent?

We got an American patent for it immediately. I'm not the usual academic. I'm not the academic that sits in the office. I have never held a post; never been Minister or Chairman of any Board, but I won't say I'm very poor. What I do is move around in search of funds for our work. We saw the commercial value of our invention and we took it to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) from where we got some money to do a preliminary design. It is in theory form now. NNPC put in some seed money for the design but the university (I'm sorry to say) was not ready for this kind of thing. Stanford University generates more than \$50 billion every year and I know how they do it. You don't have to like me if your interest is to make money and I can help make that money. At the time we brought the money to the University of Lagos, I was close to my retirement and they stalled and waited for me to leave. I told them I wasn't going to leave the country, even if I was not at the University of Lagos; I was going to be available. We had some problems eventually. The department at the University of Lagos refused to give me space to put the equipment. The place was going to be a centre for leak detection studies and the department, where it was discovered, refused to give up some space.

The department didn't lose the N10 million grant though.

From what you are saying, it would seem that universities sometimes impede progress of ground-breaking technologies?

The problem is the structure. I was talking to the people at Shell about doing this invention for them and they asked if I had the facilities? I told them I didn't but that they could give us money to set up the facilities. They refused. They queried how the money given to us would be spent. I told them Shell and Mobil give my professor a million dollars every year for his research and he can't touch that money for his personal use because the agreement they have with him is so tight and what he can get from it is spelt out in the agreement. If he goes beyond that, he goes to jail. But now they want to give us money and they are talking about how it will be spent. It is about a tight document and a Board is set up. I've been part of that system and he cannot touch the money. They blame us when the money they gave us is wasted. Here, they don't do what is done overseas—get an agreement and set up a structure. The thing is that the universities don't have the structures to take money from anybody.

Have you had offers from overseas about advancing this work, and getting it adopted in mainstream technology?

It doesn't make sense for them to contact me. This is already patented and it was patented in 2005. You have 18 years to claim sole ownership; after 18 years, it is free. Overseas, they look at the bottom line and that is why they have these huge companies. But in Nigeria, it is not in anybody's interest. When we finished the work, you know what Shell did? Shell called my student and proposed to send him to The Hague. They wanted to tap his brain. The bottom line to them is technology and they know technology is money.

In essence, is the developed world waiting for 18 years to elapse?

No. I don't know why they are waiting, but I'm just saying that if it is in their interest to contact us, they would have.

Do you have plans to undertake another project that could clinch you another major award, or even the Nobel Prize?

I'm now working on what we call bio-medical engineering, that's what I'm

I'll like to say that in Nigeria, we don't recognise excellence in anything; we recognise money. But NLNG came in and changed all of that.

interested in. I have done something on diabetes and stroke. My next phase is to do something on epilepsy. I'm working on early warning systems for seizures.

You crossed from chemical engineering to medicine. How did you manage that?

The medical people don't like me but I tell them I'm not trying to be a doctor. I'm trying to make their knowledge accessible to lower rank medical personnel, such as nurses, the paramedics and so on. What I'm trying to do is to sit down with a medical doctor, get his knowledge, put it in mathematical format and then train low-level medical personnel and get patients to manage their ailments themselves.

What is your expectation of The Nigeria Prize for Science in the next five to 10 years?

It may be a function of the fact that it's in Nigeria, but what you find is that the Prize is given to people who have contributed to solving local problems. Although, I'm solving a local problem with my research in bio-medical engineering, it's universal. It's not to criticize the Prize because you have a panel that judges and so on but the thing is that they are looking at specific local problem and giving prizes for that. I think when it gets bigger, you can decide to solve a local problem, but then you must have universal applications. First, you have to look at a local problem and then you must raise it to international standard so that everybody can use it.

You are still researching at 70, what drives you?

Let me state that I thought I had the talent. If I didn't have the talent, I wouldn't be doing this. If I go back to heaven and God asks what I have done with all the talent he gave me, I don't have to tell him. He knows, so that's the drive.

A close-up portrait of Dr. Kingsley Abhulimen, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and a red tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a thoughtful expression.

Making Invention a Reality

Few people, if any, have achieved what Greek philosophers did in the 6th century - being experts in everything from metaphysics to rhetoric. Many aspire to be like these philosophers. Amongst them is Dr Kingsley Abhulimen. Along with his teacher at University of Lagos, Professor Akpoveta Susu, they invented a mathematical solution to leak detection in pipelines. His work *Real-Time Computer Assisted Leak Detection/Location Reporting and Inventory Loss Monitoring System* won The Nigeria Prize for Science in 2004. In this interview, Abhulimen describes the road to making this invention a working technology.

Excerpts:

Describe the level of recognition gained when you won the Science Prize in 2004?

The Prize was jointly won by Professor Alfred Susu and I. I was his PhD student at the time. The work was on real time leak detection system and the prize was like an enactment of

that work, so it was really very fulfilling for me, because sometimes they look at our quality of education here and say we are no good. But that prize gave credibility to my PhD research work and it has helped me to pursue research work in that area. I have had several meetings with many stakeholders in the oil and gas industry, including Shell in Houston, Texas, and in Nigeria on my work with the prospect of developing the intellectual property further into a commercial product. The Prize gave me some credibility for those levels of discussions with the major operators. Also it has helped me in my academic environment. A lot of my colleagues like to feel that I did not do enough in my PhD research and my only defence is the prize, a patent of my work and more than 10



publications. So the prize has brought in the good and the bad.

Did talks with these oil companies begin before the Prize was awarded?

Yes, but then they saw me as one researcher from the university; but the prize lifted the level of these talks from the point of just being a researcher to becoming a stakeholder in the business. We had a non-disclosure agreement and they never took it seriously until after the prize.

Would it be right to assume that your work has made you wealthy?

I have three concepts of money; creating wealth, making money and spending money. In terms of creating wealth, I've created a lot of wealth in terms of the mentorship that comes with mentoring a lot of students who are now in the universities. The Prize also gives the credibility in terms of building partnerships, building relationships with stakeholders in the industry. I started a company through that and it's like creating wealth. If you ask about making money, I would say no. I have a product that the work has evolved into. It is called Eleaktra. I want to be able to sell that product and earn some dollars. I have not gotten there. But if you ask if I have gotten investment to develop that product, I would say yes. It's just investment from people who believe in me because of the Prize. We started a company called Syntechsys. It's a consulting outfit. There is a Board of Directors and I'm just the guy that came from the university to see how we can commercialise this product. We are at the point of selling it. So, I'm not there yet; I'm not a very rich man. I'm still a lecturer earning my salary but if you ask whether I have created the wealth that is required, I would say yes.

Are you embarking on other projects?

I'm working on several other projects. One of them is developing a system called a 'risk manager'. It's a safety measure (a management system) for offshore exploration. We are filing a patent on that work and it's a lot bigger than the leak detection system because it helps you manage your risks and safety systems on real time basis. Because they have no way

But that Prize gave credibility to my PhD research work and it has helped me to pursue research work in that area.

to quantify risk, they have probability methods. Risk is not the possibility of danger; I actually define risk as the presence of danger. I had to develop a concept called the 'belief system' and that system describes how much belief I have that this system is safe. Based on that concept, I was able to develop several different scenarios and I built a software that is rooted on a system that enables me to do that real time. I hope it can qualify for a prize at some point. I'm also very active in the entertainment industry and I'm actually becoming a major stakeholder in that industry. Can you believe that? I just concluded the 13th episode of my 'Commerce and Junction' series. It's a television programme I'm hoping to put on air. I have done some musical projects as well as a lot of promotion for some artistes. I have written a book entitled *The Return of the Home Leopard*. I'm yet to publish it. It's an African play and I pray it wins the literature prize. I'm as involved in the arts as much as I'm involved in the science world and I think there is no real demarcation between the two; it's just the language you use.

Obviously you are not done with the science, so why digress into the arts?

There is a difference between having a passion and having a mission. I have a passion for arts and I have a mission to produce scientific products that will help our nation grow. I see both as my responsibility. Although they sometimes come into conflict. As a scientist, what do I do when I'm bored? Do I start thinking about those mathematical jargons and all of that? It could be quite boring going deep, so as a scientist, you need to relax your mind with the other things that bring out your

energy and release your ability to create. When I create those stories, it serves as a kind of relief to me. You can call it my bad habit.

To quote a scientist, 'if you're a serious scientist, you won't have time for partying or socializing'. Your interest in entertainment would definitely take you into that area. Does this not affect your potentials in science?

Well, it helps my potentials because when you have a moment to pause, it means you do rest. That is good for work; it helps you invent more. There is a difference between being a scientist and being an inventor. The greatest inventors do music, write poems, and a lot of other things and some of them had some of the most exotic time. So, it is quite wrong for someone to say there is no interface.

You talked about people investing in you. What is the investment worth?

They didn't invest in me; they invested in the product that is coming out of my work. Let me describe the product: it's like a wristwatch on a pipeline but it's censored. It has Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) capability, a camera, and all kinds of sensors and even a leak detection software. It sends information to a mobile control unit that interprets the information that is relayed to a satellite station that sends it to your computer. So, those sensors are going to be sold just like a wristwatch is sold and the pipeline has to wear it. I have started discussions with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) on this project and we are trying to go into partnership. They had asked me if my system is capable of catching the vandals and I told them there is no way it can do that. However, it can provide information about the integrity of their system and about the location of the fault so they can intervene. In real time, in 3 minutes, you get all this data in your system. I'm just an intelligent person reporting an event. The police and military can deploy their teams and arrest the vandals. As far as the investment is concerned, the investors invested a lot. We need so much money to build the product, about \$2.5 million just to build a prototype and about \$5 million to perfect it and build a distribution centre.



Two Worlds of Science Research

Professor Michael Adikwu has experienced the best of two worlds in scientific development in Nigeria - as a scientist (seeking grants for research) and as a controller of grants to further science. Right in the middle of all that, he won the 2006 edition of The Nigeria Prize for Science for his work on *Wound Healing Devices (Formulations) Containing Snail Mucin* which showed that the secretion produced by snails has great potential for the healing of wounds. Since winning The Nigeria Prize for Science, Adikwu, a professor of pharmaceuticals at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has since moved to the World Bank assisted Science and Technology Education Post-Basic (STEP-B) Project as the National Project Coordinator. In this interview, he gives readers a rare glimpse into his world through his own eyes.

Excerpts:

In what ways has your life changed since you won the Prize in 2006?

The Prize brought me into limelight. I am now in Abuja coordinating a World Bank Science and Technology Education Post-Basic Project (STEP-B). I think this is one of the things that the Prize did. It brought me to the fore. People began to know that I exist. When I won the Prize, there was massive publicity by NLNG. It has actually elevated me. Presently, I am a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Science. This fellowship is not usually given to people who are not advanced in age but I have been accepted. My students are working on my discovery. So rather than look for foreign material to carry out research in wound healing and drug delivery, they are now using the snail mucin.

How much has the Prize further stimulated interest in scientific research?

More people are doing more research. After me, three people have won The Nigeria Prize for Science and people are doing more innovative research. Science grows fast. The lifespan of sciences is shorter now than it used to be. In the 1960's to the 1970's, the

lifespan was like 15-20 years. But now, it is about four to six years. New things are produced, a lot is happening and people are trying to key into them which is one of the philosophies of STEP-B which I coordinate.

The judges said if your work is properly harnessed, snail mucins can play a key role in the pharmaceutical industry. Has your work been properly harnessed?

It is being harnessed. In terms of being properly harnessed, I will say no because for anything to be properly harnessed and commercialized, there must be undertakers who have enough funds to play around with. It is a drug; anything to be used on the human skin or to be taken orally is not treated lightly. It still has to go through a lot of other stages. Since my work, a student of mine has combined the snail mucin with honey. Honey has some preservative effect which stabilizes the mucin more. On its own, mucin is a mixed product that easily degrades when left for long. But with honey, mucin becomes stable and no longer degrades rapidly. The honey-enhanced mucin was used for wound healing at the Orthopedic Hospital in Enugu. The student has gotten a PhD. Four other students have used it for various researches in drug delivery. Some of the things in drug delivery such as the mucin are got from overseas. So we have been able to substitute these things in local laboratories.

Have you tried to patent your work?

As soon as I won that Prize, I did not get enough time at the university again. I won the Prize in 2006 and I was brought to coordinate the STEP-B project. Projects are time bound. In fact, you have no time of your own, else the project will elapse. I have not been working in the laboratory or thinking of patenting anything now. That will follow when I am finished with my present job.

We are making enough progress in science. Why is this so?

Science should be culture based. Science originated based on the western intellectual tradition. One of the problems we have in Nigeria is that we see science from a different point of view. It is not being taken as part of our culture. Let me give you an example. All you need in some areas is to improve the process of a Fulani woman who prepares the meal, Fura de Nunu or a woman who processes garri. That is fermentation which is serious science. But we see science from a different perspective.

Secondly, in science, growth is built around individuals, not equipment. Science is not about ideas, but it takes someone who

has excelled to reproduce others of his kind. We lack that tradition. You will find out that people in the institutions are not reproducing their kind. Someone could be a professor for 20 years and he has not produced a professor.

You have experienced both sides of the divide when it comes to funding in universities. Why is there discord between government and the ivory towers?

What government wants to support is not clearly defined. That is one of the major problems. People just feel there is money to be shared. Since there are no proposals written and anybody can access that fund. In the long run, and most times, the things that come out from those researches are not wonderful. Government does not even demand for results. That is the difference we bring. Even though we are under government and assisted, World Bank has insisted we must monitor and demand for results.

What are your suggestions for making The Nigeria Prize for Science more prestigious?

First of all, NLNG could increase the Prize money. Secondly, it could become a continent-wide affair where people from Africa can compete for it. I will not suggest that we make it global now, because it may be difficult for an African scientist to win. We are not at par with other parts of the world in terms of equipment. Also, our people don't research as they should. When they become professors, they relax. By the time they get a federal job, they abandon the laboratory. So you will find out our researches are not as refined as what you find elsewhere. Making it an African affair is a good beginning and it can give the Prize the opportunity to make a broader impact.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

I hope to be struggling in the laboratory then. I am still supervising my PhD students and I want to have a lot of publications and make a lot of impact in the science world. We must introduce the idea of post-doctoral research into our education system. That is what happens elsewhere. People who have just finished their PhD should be allowed to bring their experience to Nigeria. Most of the equipment we buy will be properly utilised. In some foreign countries, scientists are brought from all over the world to work in one laboratory. In my laboratory, I should have people coming from everywhere to do research. Only then will I be fulfilled.



Developing Thick Skin

Dr Ebenezer Meshida, winner of The Nigeria Prize for Science in 2008, invented a material called Lateralite. As laid out in his work - *Solution to Road Pavement Destabilisation by The invention of 'Lateralite'. A Stabilising Flux for Fine Grained Lateritic Soils*, the ability to salvage the Nigerian roads from potholes and undue deterioration is within reach. So why are there still potholes on Nigerian roads even after such ingenious invention that is supposed to make a bold statement about the prowess of the nation's scientists? Find answers to this and more in this interview about the life of a top Nigerian scientist. Excerpts:

How was it for you before and after The Nigeria Prize for Science Prize in 2008?
Before the Prize, I was like every other Nigerian. There was nothing in particular. But after the Prize, it became a changed world and it still continues to be so because what NLNG did was to showcase the work and with the Nigerian Academy of Science awarding the Prize, everything changed. People I didn't know before now recognise me; they now talk to me but more importantly, we can share the science of my work and hope that the substance invented can be used in this country. NLNG is just wonderful. I can't describe what they are doing to showcase the work of Nigerian researchers. And I think this country should do something to acknowledge this annual event.

The use of Lateralite, if adopted, will go a long way in addressing problems such as

potholes and road destabilization. What has the response been like from the construction industry and government?

The product has been demonstrated in several instances to government, contractors and engineers and the only response I have received has been very disappointing. For instance, this is the first country I have seen in the world where something that is invented to solve a problem frightens prospective users. I have been told that if the substance is used, our roads will continue to be good and the federal government's allocation for road repair will be stopped. You can't reconcile that with the fear. There is preference for the roads to get spoilt frequently so that the allocation by federal government for repairs would continue. But fortunately, some countries have approved me coming over to demonstrate it.

In terms of motivation and reception to your work, how do you feel and are there other works in the imminent?

Without self-deception, I can say I feel great. I feel challenged. The substance has been further modified and my research team and I have gone further to address other difficult soils in Nigeria such as in Yola, Adamawa State and Maiduguri in Borno State among other areas. They have what we call black cotton soil that have destabilised their roads continuously and for more than 100 years, researchers have been trying to find a solution to that soil. When I took the substance to Yola and stabilized a small portion, it worked. Everyone was surprised. Right now, there is a research going on in Makurdi, Benue State to use the substance.

Since the feedback from government or private companies is not encouraging, how do you intend to turn things around?

I think there is still hope. Some estate developers are talking to me now. They want to try it on their estate roads. That will be an excellent achievement.

Is the Lateralite readily available now?

I think it is a very simple process to get the substance out. You don't have to import anything and all the materials to make it are available around here.

A number of companies do road construction as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility in their host communities. Have you thought about

initiating any contact with these companies that may be interested in saving money from rehabilitations?

I think all those contractors building roads depend on government designs and supervision. If any substance is not approved, no one can go out of the system. We are all aware of what we have locally; you don't want anything to disturb your regular income. I had voiced out my opinion, emphasising that I am a researcher, not a peddler or seller. It is either you want it or you do not want it. I am only disappointed that my country has this attitude. All researchers in the universities who have done something new have the same opinion. The government pretends that there is nothing new and people are happy to import and spend huge sums on simple things that can be done around here.

What is your advice to young scientists?

I encourage them to carry on without listening to anyone's opinion and to do their best. Someday, someone will need you; your resumé will go out and you will be interviewed and taken away. My last PhD student used this substance for his study and as soon as he put his resumé on the internet, he was taken to Australia. He went with his family because he knew his country would not do him any good. So why waste time? Some of them are in the United States of America and they are doing well. This country has nothing for them. Young scientists should develop a thick skin.

Have you got a patent for your invention?

It has been patented since 2005, even before the award.

In the midst of these challenges, where do you see The Nigeria Prize for Science in the next five years?

The Prize is a motivator for scientists to keep working. You will be surprised at the number of scientists in the universities striving to win the Prize. People are working hard. They are making breakthroughs. It is not the amount of prize money that matters, they are motivated and they are putting all they have into their thinking to get results. That is the huge contribution of the award. The mere fact that you are recognised among a group of independent assessors who don't know you or care who you are. When you really work, they acknowledge you and when you win the Prize, you thank God. Everybody looks up to you including children who will want to emulate you. So, everything expands and the success continues.

Where do you see your work in the next five years?

With the number of research students working with me, the movement will be dramatic. Maybe some day, one government boss will pick up my material and use it. I'm hopeful. We shouldn't be too pessimistic.

Still Knocking Out Sleep

Andrew Jonathan Nok didn't win The Nigeria Prize for Science by chance. He is recognised as one of the top five most productive scientists in the country. His love for research and discovering new things has brought him this far. A Professor of Biochemistry, Nok won the Prize in 2009 for his work on the discovery of the *Sialidase*, an enzyme that causes sleeping sickness known as *Trypanosomiasis*.

He is the first Director of the Centre of Biotechnology Research and Training in Ahmadu Bello University. Nok speaks on progress made on his work.

Excerpts:

How has it been since you won The Nigeria Prize for Science in October 2009?

Since 2009, I have been involved in quite a number of things particularly in DNA vaccine research. We have gone considerably far with regards to getting different forms of the enzyme expressed at different stages of the life cycle of the parasite. We have been able to identify one of the genes which is strictly expressed in the blood stream. It is absent in the insect form and that is what we are currently exploiting. We have been able to clone the gene unto a vector, and in order to develop capacity in this area, I have been able to hire at least two PhD students who are currently working on getting the different forms of the enzyme and then run the preliminary vaccination experiments.

Secondly, the Prize has been able to project the work beyond the shores of this country. When I went to Yale University sometime in 2010, I was shocked when my Jewish landlady told me about the Prize. I asked her which Prize and she replied "you think I don't know?" I found that very exciting and she wanted me to tell her the story about the trans-sialidase gene. It was the same thing with colleagues in Yale University where I was a visiting professor. By and large, we have been able to expand the scope of the work to have the different forms of the Sialidase gene. This has been quite challenging and we hope we will soon be able to publish the results in international journals.

How close are you to the actual vaccine?

From the few experiments we have conducted, we have seen that there is more than 75 percent success when you pool vaccine regimen. Usually because of the vaccine experiment, you will have to make a lot of variations and work based on international best practices. Some of the experiments we do here are done with liberty. I would have been asked for some solid clearance if we were abroad. By and large, we have come close to focusing on genes. For example, we have been able to block anaemia simply by giving the clone gene vaccination. That is significant because once you get bitten by the Trypanosome parasite, the tendency is that the





red blood cells are eaten up by the parasites. What we have been able to observe from our preliminary work is that we have been able to stop the parasite from eating red blood cells. In other words, we have been able to control anaemia. This control is significant because it has helped to subject the parasite to some stress and allowed the host to clear it.

And was this after the Prize?

Yes, it was.

Sounds like another groundbreaking feat in your experiments?

Yes, it is. But because we have competitors, we have to be careful what we report or say. That is why we choose our collaborators very strictly.

A scientist suggested that for The Nigeria Prize for Science to garner more prestige, it should be awarded for works that are universally applicable. Do you think along this line?

That is exactly what we are trying to do and that is why I talk about international best practices. We ensure that everything we do and the kind of equipment we use meet the standard in any laboratory abroad. I should say that usually there are scientists whose colleagues elsewhere must have seen some of their published works. What they do is consult you with the intention of collaborating with you and ask questions. One good thing is that you have a good number of foreign companies that, after you publish your work, contact you and keep you informed on things you need in the laboratory.

Things that people ignore in the laboratory are not accepted here. There are no exceptions to the rule. If I clone a gene and I see a fraction I cannot identify, everything is discarded, the cost of the reagent notwithstanding. If I run a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), the reagents and everything put together could be close to N75,000. These are some of best practices we observe, and it hasn't been easy. There are a lot of challenges.

You once mentioned your experiment may have far-reaching implications for the treatment of cancer. Have you established a stronger link?

The implications are becoming stronger now. Cancer cells are like other cells, except that they just grow anyhow. Remember we talked about Sialidase. Cancer cells are well structured such that they don't get killed easily. They protect their surface with a type of Sialic acid which is usually not easily recognisable by the body system. In essence, your natural security and defence mechanism would not be able to recognise

it. It is the same thing that happens with Trypanosome. If you put Trypanosome in lice, the pathogen will die and the host will be growing smoothly. If you put the same thing in a cow, a week after the animal is dead. The blood system of lice has some kind of coating that makes it impossible for the parasite to recognise, therefore, killing the host is not possible. A similar thing happened to some prostitutes in Uganda and Kenya who can not contract HIV. They are okay and perfect. Their red cells are actually not seen by the virus.

After the Prize, did government try to take ownership in developing your work?

I would say yes and no. I have never had direct invitation from government. But a year ago, I was appointed to the ETF Research Board. Professor Attahiru Jega was the chairman. Immediately he heard that I was a NLNG Prize laureate, he rushed to me and asked me to submit a proposal. He asked if I had discussed my work with any external granting bodies. He didn't want me to do that. He said ETF was keen to get involved in the work. I have been able to put in a grant application already and I am quite hopeful that I will get something out of it, so that we take it to the next level, massively producing the cloned gene and using them to begin massive vaccination.

What has the Prize done to you?

The Prize was able to raise my academic status tremendously. It cultivated respect and trust in the things that we will be doing. I am almost always consulted in quite a number of things that have to do with research in my university. The essential thing is it has been able to sensitise my colleagues who hitherto just taught in classes. Most of them are getting very serious because there is this realisation that you may not necessarily be recognised here but there are people out there who would want to see you. People respect your ideas. I have several teeming PhD thesis out there which I have to go through just because people trust that when you go through them, the possibility of having a hiccup is nil. The Prize has really placed me on a platform. I think it has placed a moral burden on me to maintain that level and to give students the same quality training.

The Prize is in its eighth year now. Do you think it has made any impact on development of science research in the nation's ivory towers?

It has really raised interest. I have to say that in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, we know those who want to compete for the Prize now. The kind of work they do is not what others do. There is one key person I know, a colleague and a friend, who is entering for the Prize this year. I happen to be with him in the top three

The Prize was able to raise my academic status tremendously. It cultivated respect and trust in the things that we will be doing. I am almost always consulted in quite a number of things that have to do with research in my university.

most productive scientists group in the university and the top five in the country. Whenever there is something serious that requires a lot of thinking and good attitude, I select those whom I talk to because I know that whatever suggestion they give is top quality. This Prize has completely changed the terrain and you now have people working hard to win it someday.

What would be your suggestions for making The Nigeria Prize for Science more prestigious?

Government, as a deliberate policy, should be part and parcel of the whole scheme just like the Nigerian Academy of Science formed by government by decree but I think they have to go beyond that. Government could partner with NLNG on the Prize, not necessarily to raise the Prize money but they could play a role in the endowment of the Prizes. This is a very common thing abroad.

Where do you see the Prize in the next five to 10 years?

I foresee a fiercer competition. I foresee that high quality work will begin to surface and some politicians will cultivate interest in actually showcasing some of these discoveries. That is why I enjoy The Nigeria Prize for Literature where if nobody hits the threshold, they throw away everything. People will begin to see that if you want to have a good rating; you have to do the right thing.

Industrialisation Uncovered

Professor Akaehomen O. Aki Ibhadode is the newest member in the league of winners for The Nigeria Prize for Science award. He designed a new method on the making of precision dies and moulds. Though, he is very humble about it, Professor Ibhadode's work is no small contribution to the development of manufacturing and industrialisation in Nigeria. In this interview, he outlines the road map to achieving industrial success.

Excerpts:

As a laureate of The Nigeria Prize for Science, what's your impression of the award?

I think the objective is to create the spirit of excellence in Nigerians and what NLNG has done is to celebrate what they feel is excellence. To me, they have done wonderfully well. I am really amazed at the focus on me all this while and many people are really inspired by what they have seen. It is already making impact on people. I predict that in the next Prize year, there is going to be a deluge of submissions for this Science Prize. The awareness is there and when people see how I have been celebrated, they will also be inspired. The Prize is having the desired impact and people are looking forward to it and making effort to see how they can be celebrated.

Do you think the Prize has a visible impact on the development of science?

Yes. The Prize is making an important statement. With the way the award is structured, I don't think it would be possible to pick everybody. One person is picked to symbolize what excellence and hard work is with the hope that people will look at that person and try to model their work and lifestyle after that person. It's an inspirational thing because not everyone can be a leader at any particular time and if the person is a good leader, he will be able to inspire people and carry them along. I see this Prize in that kind of mode. For example, at the presentation of my work, some students were so excited; they told me they wanted to be like me and I believe a statement has been made in the lives of those children. This will live them for a very long time and affect the career they pursue in life.

Funding for research is a major problem of science development in Nigeria. What do you think is the panacea to this problem?

Funding is a very big problem and it has stunted our research activities and our research development. We have always been blaming the government and from experience, we realised that government is a bit slow to respond to the desires of the people. Having said that, I think society has a greater responsibility. NLNG, in this regard, is already doing something to promote the study and impact of science in Nigeria. What are other companies doing? If we are going to become a manufacturing country and we want to be one of the 20

largest economies in the next 10 years, then private companies must be involved in research and development (R&D) activities. Most of our companies are not doing that. The big companies and multinational companies have their headquarters overseas and most of their researches are done there. They trickle down here. Our manufacturing industries do need to have a research culture because that is one way they can move forward. They need to sponsor research activities in the universities. No matter how much they are struggling to remain alive, if they don't improve operations and conduct research, their operations will not go anywhere. Our local companies need to partner with universities and be sources of funds for research. There must be some kind of symbiotic relationship between researchers in universities and research institutes. It will help their survival. That would be one way of creating research funds. It will be researches that will have utility value on the society because they will sponsor researches that will impact on their operations; not like what government would do because it is not very focused. It sponsors research and abandons the results. But if a company takes money out of its pocket, it will make sure that the money will give results that will give value and improve operations.

In an impressive presentation this year, you mentioned certain equipment that is essential for our scientific development and pointed out that the developed countries are not disposed to us acquiring these equipment. What brought about this scenario and how do we get around it?

Our manufacturing is stunted and there has been a negative decline for quite some years but I believe it is picking up now. Not being able to access some equipment abroad is probably due to the image that has been created about Nigeria over the years. There is an equipment that is made in the United States but is not sold to Nigeria and Middle-East countries, probably because the manufacturers are of the belief that the equipment could encourage acts of terrorism. But if you need the technology, there is nothing that can really prevent you from getting it. If one country does not give you, you can turn to another country. These technologies are available. China has come up technologically and they are quite liberal about some of these things.

What is your expectation of your work in the next five years?

I have always had the desire to be in the forefront of establishing a mould-making industry and manufacturing, with special preference for the automobile engine. But if we are going to progress to that level, we need a proper primary manufacturing base, which is based on using machine tools and being able to produce moulds of all forms. In the next five years, by the grace of God, I will be one of the first to establish a mould shop in Nigeria. We want to nurture this industry because it is the father of modern manufacturing. Without a solid machine tool and die mould base, we won't be able to do much in order to increase the GDP.

Who will constitute your clientele?

These will be the various companies around,

especially the plastic companies, the glass-making companies and pharmaceutical industries, among others. There will be patronage across the spectrum of industries.

How do you intend to cope with the penchant for imported products in the country?

That is a problem. But we shouldn't be pessimistic. There are signs that things will improve. That is the challenge we have in anything we do. Problems will arise. We anticipate such problems and see how we can overcome them. That is where planning comes in. We should make our production and manufacturing competitive with the rest of the world. If we are able to invest in the state-of-the-art equipment, there will be no need to go out for a quality you can get in Nigeria for a cheaper price.

Steel is a key element of successful manufacturing industry, but there is not much happening in that sector. How will this development be possible?

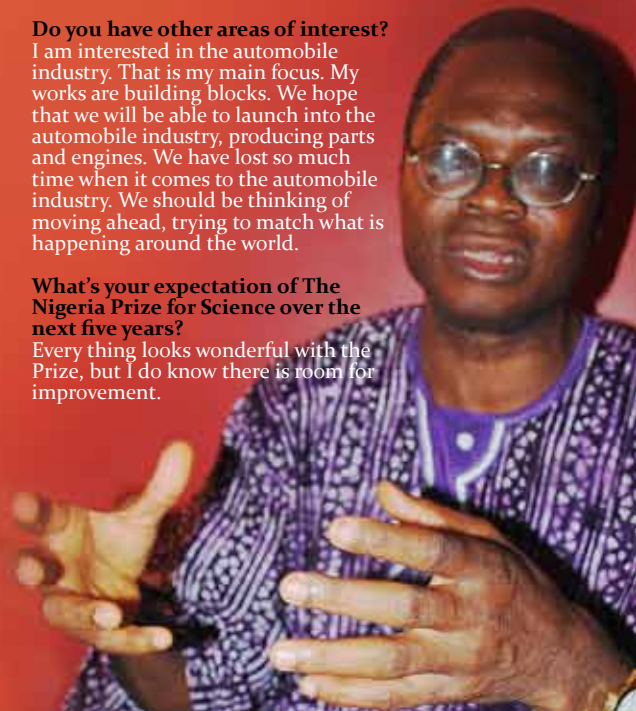
The mould-making industry depends largely on steel. We have a growing steel industry but it has not developed as much as expected with the Ajaokuta Steel Company never coming on stream and Delta Steel Company that was just revived and taken over by the Indians. There are a number of small steel companies in operation in Lagos. That is why I said let's be optimistic. I believe things will improve and, with time, we shall have a solid steel industry. However, you don't need to have all the materials before you go into production. You can source that from abroad. True, it is a problem, but we are still developing. We do hope in the next five years, things will be better than the current situation and we will have a wide range of steel materials to use.

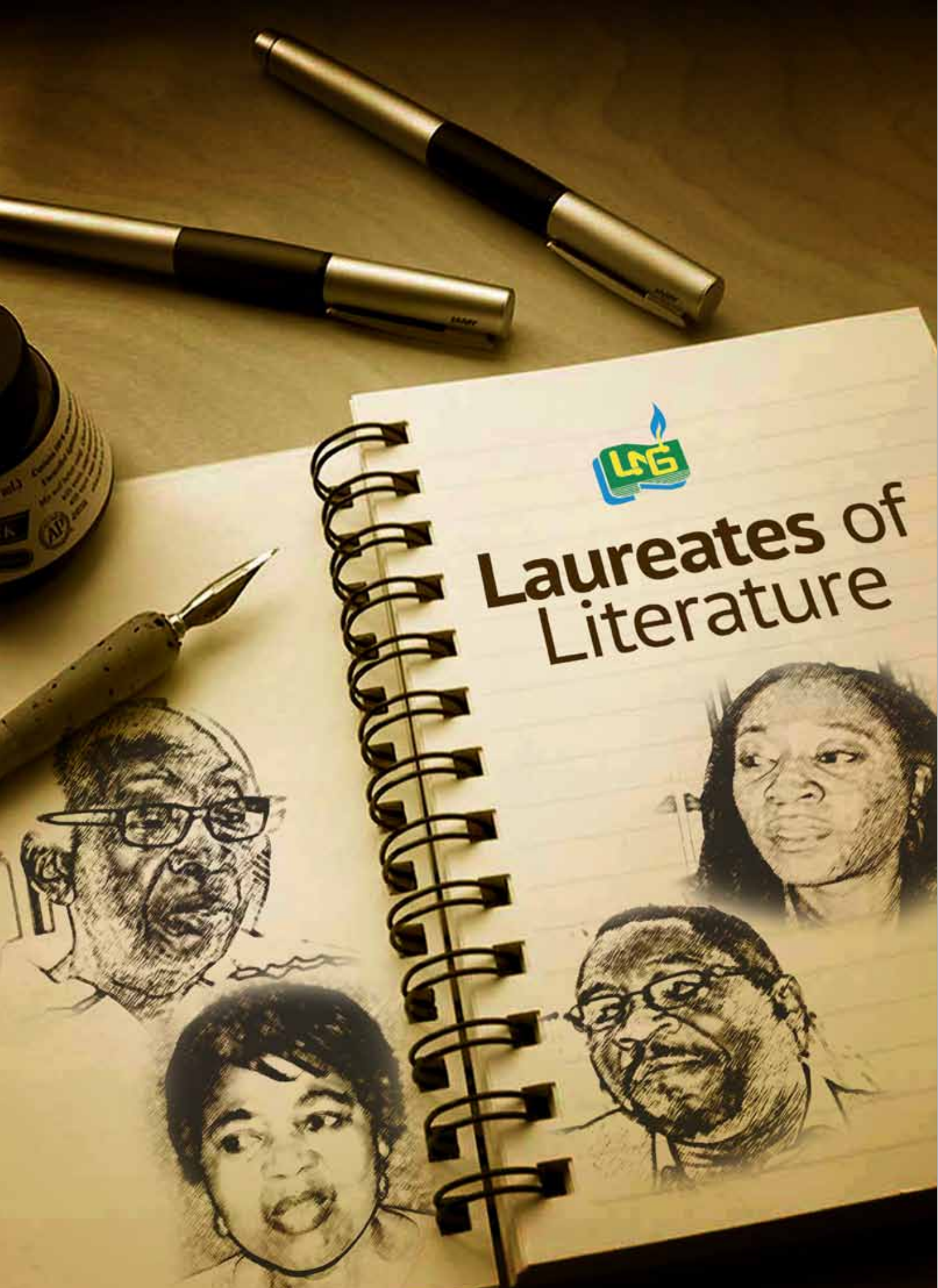
Do you have other areas of interest?

I am interested in the automobile industry. That is my main focus. My works are building blocks. We hope that we will be able to launch into the automobile industry, producing parts and engines. We have lost so much time when it comes to the automobile industry. We should be thinking of moving ahead, trying to match what is happening around the world.

What's your expectation of The Nigeria Prize for Science over the next five years?

Every thing looks wonderful with the Prize, but I do know there is room for improvement.





Laureates of Literature

More Than a Stanza to Go

When a 90-year-old man feels he still has a lot to achieve, one is bound to think something is most likely 'super-normal'. One does not expect such thoughts from a man that advanced in age. But Gabriel Okara isn't just any man. Armed with his pen, he continues to seek fulfilment in poetry and story telling to the delight of millions. Okara, who has been authoring books for more than 70 years, began winning awards way back in 1953. He was joint winner of The Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2005 for his anthology - *The Dreamer, His Vision*. He shared the Prize with Professor Ezenwa Ohaeto. In this chat, Okara gives a rare insight into his enviable pedigree, and shows just how far he could go with his talent.

Excerpts:

What does the Nigeria Prize for Literature mean to you?

The Prize means a lot to me. I consider it more valuable than the Commonwealth Prize I won back in 1979. Winning the NLNG Prize means I have been recognized in my home base. It is important to me and has given me confidence in my own base about my writing.

One reason the Prize was set up was to improve the writing and reading culture. How would you rate the success level of the Prize in this regard?

I always say, in those days there were no prizes like this. There were no Nigerian writers to read and take as role model. We read Shakespeare and other writers and poets and I happened to attend Government College, Umuahia, one of the good schools at that time. We had good teachers and a library; we were made to read and that gave me the desire to write. Before the coming of the NLNG Prize, there were similar things done but nothing in the grand, great ways like it is done by Nigeria LNG. It was done by governments, such as the British Council. When my short story won the British Council Prize, I was very happy and that spurred in me an additional drive to write. The first prize money I got was from the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) for a broadcast story and they gave me about 10 pounds. I was so happy then, because I didn't know one could make money out of writing. The NLNG project has been a great financial encouragement for people to write. With the objective to improve creative writing, efficiency, proficiency and excellence in writing to win the NLNG Prize, you had to meet international standard. This Prize has given the development of literature in Nigeria a great push up. So I think writers, non-writers and lovers of literature should give everlasting gratitude to NLNG for the institution of The Nigeria Prize for Literature.

Do you still write? Are you likely to contest for the Prize again?

Well, I don't know. I was in the United States last year and published one little book—just animal stories like the *Animal*

Farm. The title is *The Lion's Dilemma*. I am trying to put another one together sometime this year in the US again. I hope to get it ready before going. This will be a bigger one.

One reason for instituting the Prize was to boost the tottering Nigerian publishing industry, but the industry does not appear to have found its foot yet. What could be the problem?

Well, the first thing is the production. They haven't got the equipment or capacity to produce clean, beautifully-produced books. When you see books produced locally, they are either cut in an irregular manner or the printing is sometimes overlapping and that won't make any book sell at all. The first attraction of a book is the binding. People want to purchase a book that is beautifully bound. The good ones, if you ask, are taken abroad for printing, and when brought back, will be more costly and generally unaffordable. The problem the publisher is going to have with *The Lion's Dilemma* is that it is beautifully produced abroad and it will be going for about N500 to N1,000. Many people can't afford this. The publishers in Nigeria have not been able to produce books efficiently enough to attract buyers.

Again, the reading habit has something to do with it as well. Not many people read books for pleasure as we used to in those old days. We read a lot and we were sometimes called "bookworms". Not many students and young people sit down to read; you rather see them with their earphones shaking and dancing. Now, handsets come with many games with which they occupy themselves instead of reading. There are many distractions. Parents, also, don't encourage their children to read because they have lost the interest in reading themselves. They don't know or don't care whether their children read or not; they just encourage them to read their textbooks alone. Even at that, children still don't read and that is why failure is prevalent. So there are multitudes of reasons why book publishers in this country have not found their footing or are hesitant to produce books. These are business people; they want

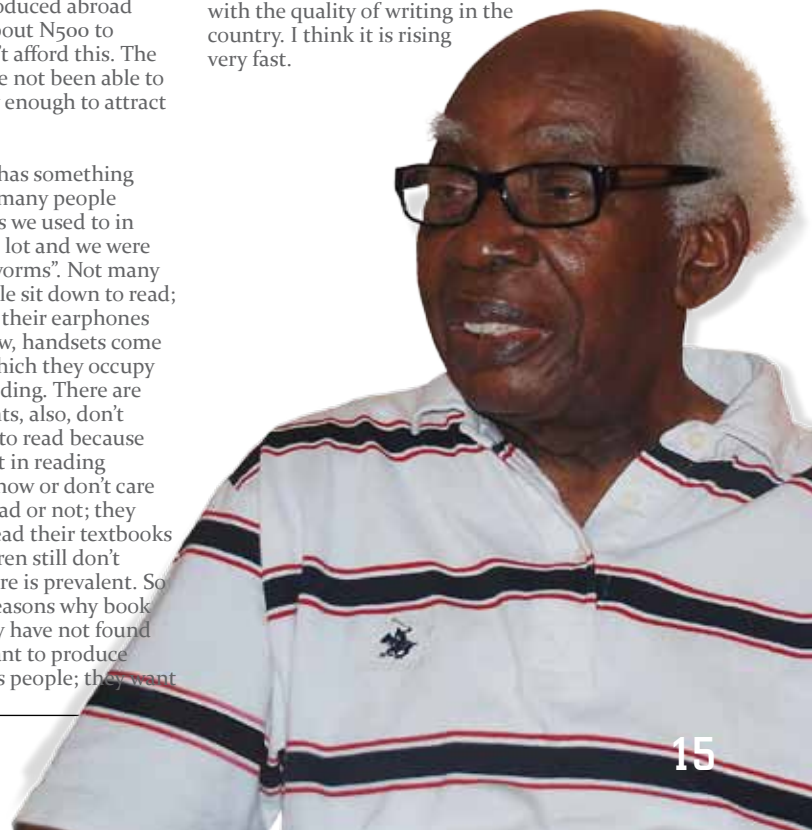
profit. With all these factors militating against their work, it is difficult for them to find their feet as their counterparts in other countries are doing. So, first problem is cost of material; second is the equipment and third is the reading habit.

What's your advice to young people who desire a career in writing?

First and foremost, as a writer, you should forget about making money. If you think that is a way of making money, just forget it. A genuine writer will write without any amount, because the urge is always there. For instance, some people in the villages just sing. They are illiterate but they sing in their languages. They sing not to get money from it, they just enjoy singing (they have the talent). When I started writing, I never thought of money. There was joy in writing. Whenever I finished a poem or a short story, I would be so happy. That joy alone drives you on, not money. So I always tell people that if you want to come into writing because of money, forget it. In those days, when you won a prize, you would be very happy. And then there was the Nigerian Festival of the Arts. In 1953 (you were not even born then), the highest medal was the silver medal, not gold, and I won the silver medal in an all round entry in the literature event with a poem. I was in heaven. So my advice is that if you want to write and you have talent, write and also read others. If you have the talent and the urge, you can even try to copy established writers to begin with, but you will have to develop your own style from that.

What's your prediction for the Literature Prize in the next five years?

Well, it is not easy to say. It depends on the promoters. It should rise proportionately with the quality of writing in the country. I think it is rising very fast.





The Last Honour

Professor Ezenwa Ohaeto's presence at Nigeria LNG's Grand Award Night ceremony in 2005 was virtually his last public appearance in Nigeria. He was co-awarded The Nigeria Prize for Literature, alongside Gabriel Okara, for his collection of poems, *The Chants of a Minstrel*. Ohaeto and Okara were the first awardees of the Prize after the maiden edition ended without a winner. He died in London months after he was bestowed with that honour.

Ezenwa Ohaeto is a poet, short-story writer, biographer, columnist and literary scholar. Some of his works include *Winging Words: Interviews with Nigerian Writers and Critics*, *The Chants of a Minstrel*, which won the ANA/NDDC Poetry Prize for 2004, and

The Voice of the Night Masquerade, all published by Kraft Books, Nigeria. He is the author of an authorised biography of Chinua Achebe, which was given the Choice Outstanding Book Award in 1998. He has received several prestigious awards, including

the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize - for *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*, a BBC poetry prize, the Orphic Lute Prize and the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Prize.

His books have been translated into Russian, French and Italian. His poetry has been performed in English and Igbo throughout the world. He was at various times a visiting professor in Germany, particularly at the universities of Mainz, Bayreuth and the Humboldt University, Berlin; and at the universities of Harvard, and Texas at Austin in the United States. He was Professor of English at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria when he died.

A Different Breed

She is described as the queen of letters and the mother of children literature.

A contemporary of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, Mabel Segun is part of a stock described by many as the best thing that happened to African literature.

Mabel Segun showed promising abilities both as a writer and as a sportswoman at the newly founded University College, Ibadan, where she was admitted in 1949. She is the first Nigerian woman to play table tennis in Nigeria, becoming an honorary male by entering for Men's Singles tournaments and was awarded the University's Table Tennis Half Colour.

She graduated in 1953 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English, Latin and History and worked with Chinua Achebe, her classmate, for the University Herald as deputy editor and advertisement manager. A short story, *The Surrender*, which she wrote in the year of her graduation, won the maiden edition of the Nigerian Festival of the Arts Literature Prize in 1954.

Mable Segun, 81, has written, co-authored and edited 11 children's books including the classic autobiography, *My Father's Daughter* and its sequel, *My Mother's Daughter*, both of which have formed the subject of university

theses and literary articles in Nigeria and overseas. She has published four books for adults including a poetry collection, *Conflict and Other Poems*; a collection of short stories published by Longman in U.K., *The Surrender and Other Stories*; and a selection of her radio talks under the title *Friends, Nigerians, Countrymen* later re-titled *Sorry No Vacancy*.

Mabel Segun's stories and poems have been published in no fewer than 30 anthologies in Nigeria and abroad. They

have been translated into German, Danish, Norwegian, Greek and Serbo-Croat. Two of her children's books have been translated into Swahili and Arabic. Her outstanding achievements in literature, broadcasting and sports have earned her national honours.

Mabel Segun was the co-winner of the 2007 edition of The Nigeria Prize for Literature for her children's book, *Reader's Theatre*. She currently lives in Lagos.



Catch



It will be remiss not to mention Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's name in the hall of fame of writers in Nigeria.

A professor of English at the University of Lagos, Adimora-Ezeigbo has written over 15 books (at least 10 are children's books); over 45 academic papers in local and international journals and chapters in books, and short stories in five anthologies.

Her novel, *House of Symbols*, was selected as one of 25 Best Nigerian Books published in the past 25 years (1978 - 2003). She is joint winner of The Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2007 for her book *My Cousin Sammy*. She shared the Prize with Mabel Segun who won the Prize with *Readers' Theatre*, also a children's book. She is an interviewer's delight.

Excerpts:

You were joint winner of The Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2007. What impact has the Prize had on you?

The Prize was very useful to me. It helped me do things. I regard myself as blessed. It brought me to more prominence. The Prize made my name better known in the country. More people heard about me because the publicity was there. And the book has sold. That has been quite useful. What the NLNG Prize has done for us includes impressing on us the need to make our manuscripts better and to publish books only when they are ready to be published and go the extra mile to improve language. I was involved in the first year of the Prize. One of my novels got what I may describe as honourable mention. The Prize was not given that year. When the judges said there were errors in the book, I didn't get angry. What I did was to go back to the book and I did find a particular item that I had repeated wrongly. I took responsibility for that. What I did was to correct that and the book was re-issued in a better shape. There is no reason to get angry when you are criticised. Nobody is perfect. I am a professor of English, but my children can correct me and I don't feel angry about it. Even the native speakers of English make mistakes in their language, so why should I be ashamed? What I can do is to keep improving myself. I think one thing we can do as writers is self-criticism and listening to other critics.

One of the goals of the Prize is to stimulate writing and get young minds to read more. How do you, as a teacher, rate the reading culture in Nigeria?

It is only just improving. It hasn't got there, because many students do not read outside the syllabus. This is one thing we try to encourage them to do at the university. I encourage my students to read beyond the recommended texts. Even with the recommended texts; they should also read other books that are related. It is really a battle to get our people reading. But things are improving. Some publishing companies are becoming involved and they organize events for school children. I think in the area of children literature, more has been done. One of my publishers, Lantern, has organised literary events in many schools in various cities. And sometimes, I am invited to come and talk to them. I wish it will also be the same for adults. How to go about this is to organise reading workshops. Many people do not go out of their way to buy books. They only buy set texts in the sciences and other areas of study and since literature is not compulsory, many children drop

Akachi if You Can

it somewhere along the line. Organised reading workshops will help bring the awareness of book culture in our society.

Television has taken over children entertainment today. Is there any way writers can ride on this trend to stimulate reading culture?

We need to open up libraries in schools in the cities and rural areas. This was the way it was when we were in school. In fact, one of the things that created this awareness of reading in me was a wonderful library in my school. I went to a school that was run by missionaries and I read practically every book in that library. Before you can write, you have to be a reader. There is no substitute at all. A writer can not write well if he or she is not an avid reader. What we need to do is to train them to give time to reading, not just playing computer games and watching television. There are so many things competing with reading today and children need to be guided because their interest is being drawn to many areas. You could allow them to enjoy all these things but we must ensure that they are readers. Reading is a culture you can start early and carry it to the grave. Even if you are 80 years old—unless your eyesight is so bad you can read at any age. It is such a wonderful habit. By the age of seven, a child should be reading (I believe in teaching children their mother tongue before they are three years old).

What inspires you?

Inspiration comes from anywhere—even when you are walking on the street or conversing with your friends. Ideas come from everywhere. The most important thing is that you should note them as they come because if you don't write them down, you will forget. In my novel, *Trafficked*, I was inspired by the incident of human trafficking. A few years ago, Titi Atiku Abubakar was running an NGO on this. Women were shown returning from places such as Italy where they were trafficked. I said to myself 'why don't I write about this problem?' It is a terrible problem and we need to talk about it.

When do we see an entry from you again?

As long as we are free to submit our work for any Prize and competition. It is the writers' privilege. I want to say that most of the time my books win prizes; the books are entered by my publishers, not me. This is what happens abroad. Publishers submit

books for awards and they look for the best book to submit. So if my publishers decide to submit my book for any prize, I have no problem. If the book is good enough to win, it will win. But if there are better books, they will win. This is my attitude about this.

How can the Literature Prize be better?

I think NLNG has done well. I want to encourage them to continue to choose the best judges ever. That is the way they do it everywhere; judges with integrity, with fairness, judges who select winners not because of who they are and where they come from. The work itself should determine whether it wins or not. NLNG should continue to maintain integrity of the Prize. It should not be a federal character thing. They should continue to look at the texts. That is why someone such as Ben Okri was able to win the Booker Prize or why Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize.

How can the Prize become international?

Every Prize has its limitations and focus. In the United Kingdom, there are hundreds of prizes and each of them has its target. Each defines itself. There are prizes meant for first time writers or a particular age. But one thing I noticed is that all the prizes are meant for books published in the UK, even the Booker Prize. You can't submit a book published in Nigeria for the Booker Prize but it can be written by any national. That is its definition. People who institute prizes know what they want. NLNG Prizes are for Nigerians in the country and in the Diaspora.

Has the Prize impacted on the publishing industry in country? Would you say publishers have stepped up their game?

Unfortunately, they haven't. Many publishing companies are not publishing enough because they don't have the capital and the market. For these reasons, many of them can't publish, although many authors have produced good manuscripts. What we are looking at now is how to identify good manuscripts in Nigeria and get them published. How can the publishers be helped to publish more books and how can we train more editors? There are few good editors in this country. Even as a professor of English, I don't regard myself a good editor. I do a lot of editing, but even at that, I am not a trained editor. There are people whose job is to edit. What we need is have a more vigorous publishing enterprise. The

government can help by way of lesser tax on newsprint, printers and equipment. Nigerian publishers are going through a lot. There is no power and their profit margins are reduced with fuel cost for generators. Many of them are not able to pay royalties to their writers, because they don't break even. Another thing publishers complain about is piracy. They say some people go to their backyard and reprint those works in a very shoddy manner. So if something can be done about piracy, it will help. Government can help in the issue of power and tax reduction.

There is a perception that the problem with literature in Nigeria is the divide between the scholars and writers. Do you subscribe to this line of thought?

This is funny, because many writers are also academicians. You can never tell someone to write or not to write. No one can claim ownership of writing. A writer can be an engineer, a doctor or anybody. What we want to see is writers facing this business of writing and stop complaining. Your work will speak for you. Your work will promote you. My advice to writers is to write and improve their abilities and style. If academicians choose to write creatively, they have the right to do that. Academicians are better critics but some of us have the ability to write. I was writing before I became an academician. Why should someone tell me to stop writing? Once you feel the ability to write, just do it.

Critical reviews tend to add value to books but we don't have so many reviews anymore in the country...

The problem with the Nigerian society is that anything the people are not aware of does not exist, as far as the people are concerned. I have read in the newspapers criticisms about younger critics who keep asking 'what will happen to us when the older critics are gone?' That is not true. There is hardly any year universities do not organise conferences. That is where academicians go to present papers on literature. All the time, there is criticism of works but the ordinary man in the street would not know this because he is not attending conferences. And the ordinary writer that does not go a step further may not be aware of this. The newspaper is a good way to do reviews but not all the reviews published are being done on the pages of the newspapers.

Not Ready to Quit

To date, nobody has come so close to winning The Nigeria Prize for Literature back-to-back as Ahmed Yerima, professor of Theatre Arts, Kwara State University, Ilorin. In 2006, he was unbeaten, winning with his play, *Hard Ground*, and in 2010, came very close to winning the Prize again with his play, *Little Drops*. Yerima remains one of the most creative playwrights and theatre directors in Nigeria, with 29 plays to his credit.

Want to know his impression of the NLNG Prize, his definition of excellence or what spurs him to write so prolifically? Read on.

What impact has winning the Prize in 2006 had on your life?

It's been very good in terms of me taking writing seriously, because when you end up winning an award like The Nigerian Prize for Literature, you have to begin to take yourself seriously, especially when you then discover that people are also taking you seriously. People begin to reason that "since you won such an award, it means it's not just a fluke, he's not just attempting to write, and he's not just having fun scribbling things, maybe we should look at it again. They begin to look at the works you have done before and begin to find new meanings to them. Society then gets interested in placing you within its own thematic structure and tries to figure out your relevance". These are questions that come up when you win the NLNG Prize and it shows the kind of respect given. That's what the Prize has done; it makes even your students and your university to take you seriously. When my Vice-Chancellor hears I'm coming to see him, he knows it is not just any lecturer coming to see him, he sees the literature laureate for the country. That is the kind of thing the Prize has done for me; it has given me so much load to carry.

Speaking of load, the Prize has done two cycles now. Should the stakeholders be looking forward to another new entry from you?

Writers don't retire which is a beautiful thing. It was interesting seeing my own teacher, Professor Soyinka, in December in Port Harcourt saying he is working on a new play at his age, so who am I to retire? I think that's what keeps us alive. Last night,

I was able to go through the draft of my new play which has been commissioned. I saw new things I hadn't added which I did. So I can say there is no time to retire. If I do write a good play in another three or four years when it is time for drama, and my publishers feel it is worth putting in, I would, and maybe they might just say "this old man again" then throw it out or they might take it to the end and say let him win. That's why I was afraid I wouldn't be invited to be a judge because being a judge automatically retires you. So you might find my works for a long time in the Prize process because I respect the Prize, the people, and the process selection, losing and winning.

Do you think the Prize has improved or impacted on the quality of writing in the country?

I think it has improved the quality on all levels. Personally, what it has done for me is to make me think even when using a word such as 'and', I make sure it is correct because people are not going to take it as a mistake. Where you will forgive another playwright for grammatical errors, they won't forgive 'Yerima' and when the play is shabbily ended or the plot is not tight, they will say "let it go for James but for Yerima who won the Literature Prize, this is rubbish". So people will take you seriously and the beauty of it all is when you find students you don't even know reading you, they go to any length to get your phone number, email or Facebook address. They tell me they want to be like me and I think that it is the effect of the NLNG award.

The aspiration first for me is wanting to be a better playwright and then, having people aspiring to write like me. NLNG has raised the stakes for me and I have raised the stakes for myself, then I have also raised the stakes of those people who want to be like me and it trickles down. Even the publishers will then start considering improving on their binding. I believe that both the publishers and the writers have improved and now it is interesting when I see critical works and perspectives on Nigeria literature in 21st century discussed on literature and I look at the back and I find my name, even if the comments are bad, it is still good because there is a level of recognition. Due to the book *Niger Delta Literature* by Professor Austin Asagba, even if most of the comments about my book were negative, it got recognised by NLNG which, in turn, led to a chain of events that made me to be recognised by Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State. What I loved most were the workshops attended by young students from the Niger Delta, some who believe that I owe them the duty of reading their plays because I wrote about their people. So now I have about 100 plays I have to read but I see it as a good thing and I believe that this is the trickle down effect of the NLNG award. Whether we like it or not, it is going to spread. I am going to train the trainers and they in turn will train trainers. It will become a continuous cycle. All of us who had placed entries and those who had won the NLNG Prize came together to organize a workshop for young writers in Ibadan. It was wonderful and this is a great step which is a result of the NLNG award.



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You almost won the Prize a second time. How was that experience?

It is better to win than lose, than to lose and then win. When I lost, I was still a laureate; losing didn't change anything. What winning again would have just done for me was that the glass plaque in my study would have been moved aside for another one but if I lose, I lose. Losing, for me was a bit painful because the man who won wasn't alive for me to say congratulations to him. Worse still, I didn't have a copy of his play to read and learn from because play writing is like cooking a good meal and you find

that just something very little will make the other guy's offering better. So I would have really loved to learn from him because what I did when I won in 2006, was to make sure we performed the play by Emeka Ekwueme which really came close to winning. It was just a twist and he could have won. So I am not better than he is, but I was luckier. I had seen Femi Osofisan's play when the church that sponsored the commissioning showed it, but I had not seen Emeka Ekwueme's play, so I was excited to see it.

Again I would have loved to see or talk to Irobi Esiaba. When I found that all people who knew him said he was a crazy intellectual and he reminded me of all the brilliant minds. I would have really loved to speak with him. In that situation, it was a double loss for me, because I lost the Prize to a great man and I lost the opportunity of meeting him, but I was also consoled that my name would be mentioned before his. In fact they now mention Gabriel Okara before mentioning me, which makes me feel good but then I would have loved to be mentioned twice.

How can the Nigeria Prize for Literature be an international brand?

I think is already international because you've opened it up to the outside world, to Nigerian writers outside the country and it was an interesting thing when we were in Port Harcourt, there were "the local" and by that I mean those of us who live in Nigeria and have won the Prize and then there were the young ones and those of them who had won awards such as the Orange Award. So it was interesting and I found we were

better known because we were at home and we had a grasp of what was going on. They were talking within the environment they lived. The Prize didn't ride us but it made us older and gained us more respectability. So it made me feel like there is a need to open it up because no matter what Prize they won outside, they still need it. It reminded me about when I was schooling in England because even though I was riding a Jaguar, it was still not as precious to me as when I was riding an Igala when I was at Ife. I was at home in England; I had to be wearing a suit to drive my Jaguar because policemen would stop me, wondering how a black man could ride this expensive car. So, I think with time, people will respect the Prizes even more than they already are. This is what we have right now and it is coming from a genuine source, it is our thing and we shouldn't kill it.

We should be an inspiration to others and I think that is what NLNG is doing and now that oil has been found in Ghana, it wouldn't be a surprise if they began their own Prize for literature in another year or so. That is what they have done with our Nollywood. Just about everybody, even unheard of countries have their own form of film industries and that is the whole beauty of Hollywood. I think that is the kind of respectability we need and I don't think you guys should try any harder because you have given birth to a good thing, let it grow and don't try to control the growth.

Finding Wetin Lawyers Dey Do...

Kaine Agary is popular in two circles - law and literature. Known for her project 'Wetin lawyers dey do...sef?' as well as her law enlightenment projects in the secondary schools, Kaine is, perhaps, more popular for clinching The Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2008 with her novel, *Yellow Yellow* - a first attempt at writing and recipient of two awards before the Nigeria Prize. A Masters Degree holder in Public Administration, Kaine is currently studying law. Her story is a must read.

What have you been up to since you won the award in 2008?

For those who read my work, I haven't done any literary work since I won the award in 2008. I started a Law Degree in 2009 and I'm finishing this year. I've also been trying to finish my second novel, which I put on hold to focus on my degree. Once I'm done with my degree, I'll finish the novel. Once in a while, I'm called to make appearances and I have also written some short plays but nothing major.

The way you claimed the Prize in 2008 came with a lot of expectations, how have you managed those expectations?

I try not to have it in my consciousness because I discover that when I'm writing, especially when I began working on my second novel, I felt more pressure than when I was working on the first one so I had to consciously do away with that. I don't write for a Prize or because people expect me to write a certain way, I just write the story the way I feel like writing it. Definitely, with the success of *Yellow Yellow* there is that pressure to make sure the second book is just as good or even better but I'm trying not to allow that to affect my style.

Don't you now feel like stepping up your game and aim for something higher?

Certainly, but not because I'm aiming for a Prize. I want people who are expecting my second novel to be satisfied when they read it. I want them to feel the same way I feel about my favourite authors. There are authors I love and I always buy their novels so, of course I want to write a good story people will enjoy, especially for those who read *Yellow Yellow* and are expecting my second. I don't want them to be disappointed.

How close are you to other writers in Nigeria?

Right now, I am not very close because my world is all about my Law.

So how's your writing? Any major challenges right now?

Its going well, I like it. No challenges exactly, I have the story in my head and I've done a lot of the research that I want to do. So it's just to finish writing it because I've started and this one is closer to me than *Yellow Yellow*, it's inspired by the loss of a friend. It was my way of dealing with the mysteries surrounding his death. It's closer to me.

Administrators of The Nigeria Prize for Literature have opened the Prize to Nigerians abroad. Is this a good idea?

I'm going to keep my comments on that to myself. To NLNG, the administrators of the Prize, my thoughts before and my thoughts now are the same. The administrators can decide how they want to manage the Prize and whoever doesn't like it should get another corporate sponsor to do a Prize that they will like.

Would you say the fact that the judges are not anonymous affects the quality of the process?

One can't really say. I know that for my Prize, I didn't know who the judges were but there was talk that they were influenced by me or people I knew and I'm not sure how people come up with such notions. But now that the judges are open, there is more credibility because you can see the quality of people there. On the other hand, there is a greater chance people can get to them. So it all depends on how you look at it. But for me, it makes no difference. It's

the prestige of the Prize that is at stake, so the administrators won't just call anybody to judge. Really, I don't know why it's such a big deal.

What's your prediction for the Prize in the next five to 10 years?

I think in the last year or so, I have been impressed by the fact that they are now more active and trying to do more for the literary world. I received a call from a young girl who said she would be attending a workshop organized by NLNG in Ibadan. I think that's good because one of the issues I had before was that after you win the Prize, you don't hear anything more from the company concerning literature. I believe workshops are good because they will only help to develop the local market and put them in a better position to compete globally.

What good did the Prize money do for you?

It has helped pay for my degree and the award has opened doors for me inside and outside the literary world. In different places, I realize that people now know my name. The Prize has really helped. What's the update on the secondary school programme? I still do it, but it's a bit tough because it's all funded through corporate sponsorship. It's the Law and Policy Club for public performing school children. We are trying to arrange a mock trial competition for them this year. It should be fun.



A Robe, A Crown & An Ovation

Esiaba Irobi believed he shared the same destiny of agony and pain with Nigeria as he was born the same day the nation was birthed. Perhaps, that was the driving force behind his relentless and audacious search for perfection.

Esiaba had his fingers in many pies. He was a playwright, poet, stage director, actor, literary theorist and scholar. Educated at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), the University of Sheffield and the University of Leeds, both in England, Irobi's forte was drama, film and theatre studies. A passionate theatre artist, Irobi taught at UNN; the University of Leeds, and the Liverpool J. Moores University in England; New York University, Townson University; and the Ohio University, Athens, all in the United States of America. He was on a Fellowship at Freie University, Berlin, Germany, at the time of his death on 3 May 2010.

He died just a few months after he sent in his entry, *Cemetery Road*, for the 2010 The Nigeria Prize for Literature. His published plays include: *The Colour of Rusting Gold* (1989), *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh* (1989), *Hangmen Also Die* (1989), *Nwokedi* (1991), *The Other Side of the Mask* (1999), *The Fronded Circle* (1999), and *Cemetery Road* (2009).

At the time of his death, he was also working on the final drafts of many other plays, several of which were in fact already in press: *Sycorax*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival Theater, USA;

Foreplay, commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre, London, England; *What Songs Do Mosquitoes Sing*; *I am the Woodpecker that Terrifies the Trees*; *Zenzenina*; *The Harp*; and *John Coltraine in Vienna*, among others. His collections of poetry include *Cotyledons* (1987), *Inflorescence* (1989) and *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin* (2005).

In 1992, Esiaba clinched the World Drama Trust award in Britain with *Cemetery Road*.

The 2010 edition of The Nigeria Prize for Literature was the first post-humous award won by the late Irobi.



Our Gift to Nigeria

Prices... powerful forces for change. The Nobel. The Booker. The Pulitzer. **The Nigeria Prize for Literature, and The Nigeria Prize for Science.**

Inaugurated in February 2003, The Nigeria Prize for Literature and The Nigeria Prize for Science have made their mark as prestigious national prizes.

Nigeria LNG Limited wishes to use them to re-establish a creative, innovative environment in Nigeria, use them to rekindle interest in education and learning, make writers and scientists the new role models.

Recognising that significant literature and science prizes have transformative powers, Nigeria LNG Limited has therefore increased the cash value of the prizes from **\$50,000 to \$100,000** each. Excellence has its rewards. And comes with a high prize; a high price.

It is common knowledge that NLNG does not do mediocre, does not do second best, does not do consolation prizes, "nice try" certificates, or token pats on the back. Our judges are quite happy to not hand out any awards at all, if the entries do not meet a very high standard — excellence.

Excellence should be the standard in all facets of our national life.

Excellence is our wish for Nigeria on this Democracy Day.



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