

# EXCELLENCE

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IN THIS ISSUE

## SOLVING AFRICA'S CHALLENGES ONE SECTOR AT A TIME

THROUGH  
ACE IMPACT, SPESSE  
& NgREN



# MEET THE EXCELLENCE TEAM

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# FROM THE PUBLISHER

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*Welcome to yet another captivating edition of Excellence, an innovative fusion of the sciences, technology, education, agriculture, procurement, social, and environmental issues.*

This edition offers a unique perspective on three significant projects within the Nigerian University System (NUS): the Second Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact), Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE), and the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN).

*You will be reading about the impressive exploits of the ACE Impact and SPESSE Centres of Excellence as they strive to meet project development objectives while proffering solutions to challenges in sub-Saharan Africa.*

From discovering interesting crop varieties, genome sequencing, securing international recognition for postgraduate programmes, and empowering public servants to combat wastages and corruption, these Centres of Excellence continue to push boundaries and redefine Nigeria's educational landscape.

Despite a rather bumpy start, we can confidently say that the ACE Impact Project is on a steady and promising trajectory, as statistics from the last country roundtable held in May indicate that the Project in Nigeria has surpassed the project average on all key indicators.

On the SPESSE front, I am pleased to announce that since our last edition, all six Centres of Excellence have secured national accreditation for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered under the three components: Procurement, Environmental Standards and Social Standards. All six Centres have also enrolled students into these programmes in addition

to offering short courses to candidates from both the private and public sectors.

Both projects continue to leverage the NgREN for uninterrupted access to High-Performance Computing (HPC), Learning Management Systems (LMS), Broadband Connectivity, and other requisite resources, enhancing the learning experience.

Not too long ago, Nigeria's capital city, Abuja, hosted the 2024 edition of the annual West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN) conference, bringing together global stakeholders to shape future-ready higher education and research communities.

Today, both ACE Impact and SPESSE are past their mid-term milestones, and I am delighted to share that following extensive consultations between the World Bank and relevant stakeholders, a one-year extension for the ACE Impact Project has been announced, with the Project now expected to close in June 2025. I am optimistic that the Centres will seize this opportunity to maximise their earnings before the project closes. There are also strong indications that SPESSE will be extended beyond its original closure date of October 2024.

While we look forward to the anticipated extension of the SPESSE Project, we invite you to join us in exploring how these projects are shaping the future, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market.

Happy reading!  
Yours sincerely,

*Chris J. Maiyaki*

Ag. Executive Secretary

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## FROM THE PROJECT COORDINATOR

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*Dear Readers,*

*We are thrilled to welcome you to this edition of the Excellence Magazine, where we highlight the significant advancements and ongoing efforts on the Second Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence for Development*

*Impact (ACE Impact), the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE), and the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) Projects.*

In our last issue, we mentioned that the ACE Impact Centres were actively pursuing international programme and institutional accreditation from globally-recognised accrediting bodies, such as the Royal Society of Biology, in the United Kingdom, Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programs (AQAS), Germany, Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation (APHEA), Belgium, the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) in France and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the United Kingdom.

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*I am delighted to inform you that today, the Centres' resilience and hard work have paid off, as results granting the Centres programmes international accreditation have begun to pour in.*

The Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement Centres of Excellence (SPESSEs) on the other hand have secured accreditation from the National Universities Commission (NUC) for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered under Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards.

Both projects continue to conduct teaching and cutting-edge research and proffer Africa-led solutions to challenges not only in Nigeria but across the continent.

To promote the cross-fertilisation of ideas and internationalisation of education, both ACE Impact and SPESSE continue to engage visiting faculty from reputable institutions around the globe. These efforts ensure that the Centres not only enhance the quality of teaching and learning but also remain globally relevant and competitive in these dynamic times.

On a sad note, we regret to share that we lost a vibrant member of the SPESSE team, Professor Mohammed Bello Yunusa, Centre Leader of the SPESSE Centre of Excellence at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, who passed in March. While we grieve this loss, we take solace in the impact which he made on the SPESSE Project. Also on SPESSE, we bid farewell to the former World Bank Task Team Lead (TTL), Mr Ikechukwu Nweje, and we welcome to the fold, the new TTL, Mr. Ishtiaq Siddique, a Lead Procurement Hub Coordinator with the World Bank. We appreciate Mr Nweje's commitment to the success of the project and we wish him success and fulfilment in his future pursuits.

This year, the ACE Project is 10 years old and, in our next edition, we will be showcasing the Project's impact in the Nigerian University System (NUS) and across the sub-Saharan Africa region.

As we look forward to the ACE @ 10 celebrations, we invite you to join us on this exciting journey into the world of ACE Impact, SPESSE and NgREN.

We also invite you to share your thoughts on all three projects by visiting our newsletter website, [www.excellencenewsletter.ng](http://www.excellencenewsletter.ng).

We hope you find this edition insightful.

*Dr. Joshua Atah*

National Coordinator, ACE Impact & SPESSE

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# WACREN 2024:

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*FGN Urges Greater Collaboration on Digital Education, Research  
...EU commits €37m to RENs*



A cross-section of participants during the WACREN 2024 Conference which was held at the Abuja Continental Hotel

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has tasked African countries with greater cooperation in harnessing the power of research and education without which the continent cannot move

forward. Nigeria's Minister of Education, Professor Tahir Mamman, made this call while declaring open the 2024 edition of the West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN) Conference in Abuja.

According to the Minister, "We must harness the power of research and education to propel the African continent forward. Whether it is in the fields of healthcare, technology, conference, agriculture, or governance. The Minister underscored



the transformative power of collaboration and innovation, emphasising that the development of Africa depends on the output of her research works adding that education is the cornerstone of development, upon which nations build their future. “We also recognise the transformative power of education in shaping lives, through innovation and fostering sustainable development, he said. Professor Mamman further emphasised the importance of leveraging initiatives like the WACREN conference to strengthen regional ties and build networks that transcend geographical boundaries. He called for collective efforts to advance education and research in West and Central Africa, recognising the potential for innovative minds and scholarly endeavours to provide solutions to pressing issues.

In his remarks, Acting Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), Chris J. Maiyaki, while speaking on the conference theme, “Forging Future High Education and Research Communities,” emphasised the need for proactive, innovative, and forward-thinking approaches to teaching, learning, and

research. He encouraged participants to embrace digital transformation, foster collaboration, and cultivate a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among students and faculty. The Acting ES highlighted the importance of preparing higher education and research communities for the challenges and opportunities ahead, calling for engagement in thought-provoking discussions, sharing best practices, and exploring innovative solutions to common challenges.

He encouraged all participants to “actively engage in sessions, network with their peers and seize the opportunity to contribute their expertise and insight to the discussions, so that, together, we can forge stronger, more resilient higher education and research communities that are capable of shaping a brighter future for generations to come.”

The European Union (EU) Ambassador to Nigeria, Mrs Samuela Isopi, disclosed that her organisation has earmarked the sum of €37 million to assist African and Arab nations to digitalise education and research. Speaking through the First Secretary/Team Leader,

Human Development Delegation of EU to Nigeria, Leila Mathieu, she said, “As the European Commission, we are committed to continue supporting the digital transformation of the education and research and innovation sectors in Africa and to increase the capacity of Research and Education Networks (RENs) to deliver to their member institutions. We will do this in full complementarity with other programmes on regulatory support and connectivity investments for a comprehensive Africa-Europe digital partnership. “We aim at fostering our digital partnership with Africa by promoting access to high-quality, affordable and secure digital infrastructure by supporting the set-up of policy frameworks, and by fostering digital skills and entrepreneurship. This project is currently in its third phase with a total budget of €37.5 million. Remarkable progress has been achieved, providing meaningful connectivity and services to over 1,700 institutions and 4.5 million end-users.” She also noted the EU was supporting education at all levels, as well as science and innovation. This, she stated, was with the hope to help Nigerian academics, institutions and





WACREN CEO, Dr Boubakar Barry (4th from left) and CEO, NgREN, Dr Joshua Atah (6th from left) with some participants during the WACREN 2024 Conference

scientists better access its competitive global funds, such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus for Nigeria to take its rightful position in international science and academia, fostering better and closer collaboration with European academic and research institutions. Chief Executive Officer of WACREN, Dr Boubakar Barry, on his part, thanked their partners, particularly, the European Commission, for the success achieved so far. He commended the French Development Agency (AFD) for its support of the Africa Digital Campus project in our region and the World Bank for enabling new NRENs to be connected

to the WACREN backbone network. He also expressed optimism about strengthening WACREN's cooperation with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in the years to come.

Closing the week-long event, the Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN), Dr Joshua Atah, described the conference as successful. "We have explored innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and research, and we have identified opportunities for collaboration and partnership that will

shape the future of higher education in West and Central Africa. Despite the diverse backgrounds and perspectives represented in this room, we have come together with a shared vision and a shared commitment to excellence", he said.

"The challenges facing higher education and research in our region are significant, but they are not insurmountable. By leveraging our collective expertise and resources, I believe that we can build a future where education catalyses positive change and sustainable development."



ACE-Teens after a hands-on training on solar photovoltaics, inverters, and battery technology

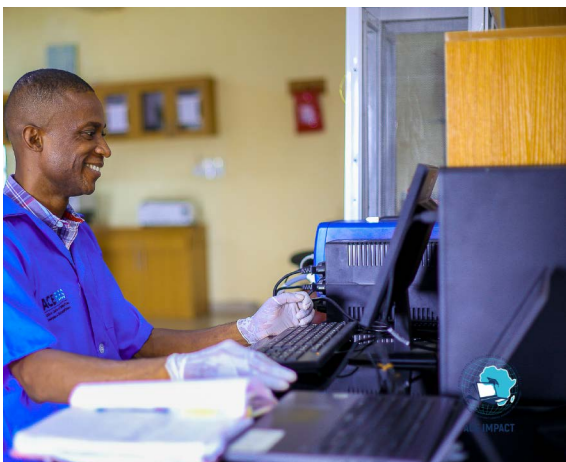
# EMPOWERING TEENS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

*By Victor Aniefiok*

Undeterred that it is one of the newer ACE Impact Centres in Nigeria, the Africa Centre of Excellence in Future Energies and Electrochemical Systems (ACE-FUELS), domiciled in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), has carved a niche for itself with its ACE-TEENS STEM + E-BOOTCAMP. As its name implies, the boot camp is a training programme for youngsters between the ages of 8 and 18 years, and it aims to encourage teens and pre-teens to, at an early age, develop and nurture a passion for Science, Technology, Engineering, and emerging technologies, through practical hands-on training.

ACE-FUELS believes that nurturing robust literacy skills in young minds not only equips them with reading and writing abilities but also lays a foundation for success across various academic domains.

Hosting the most recent edition of the ACE-TEENS STEM + E-BOOTCAMP, ACE-FUELS brought together 26 teens to train them on computer programming, web design, wastewater treatment, solar photovoltaics, inverters and battery technology,

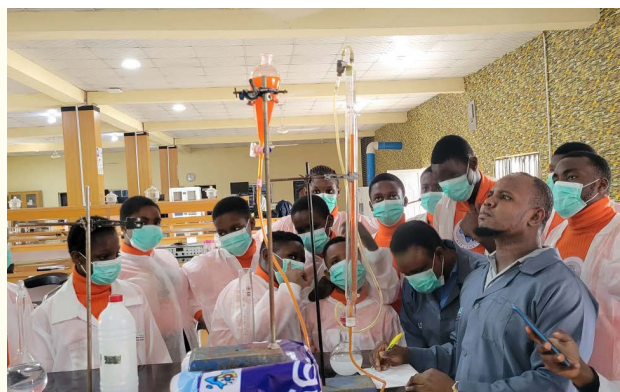


nanotechnology. The boot camp also covered areas such as microbial fuel cells, solar energy, artificial intelligence, digital communication, embedded systems, leadership skills, and the Internet of Things (IoT) for the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Using interactive projects, the participants were encouraged to apply the theories learnt in the practical world, thereby inspiring them to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

To equip them with the knowledge and skills to react to real-life health emergencies, the teens visited FUTO's Department of Health Services, where they were guided through practical sessions on first aid measures for different ailments such as febrile illness, snake bites, trauma, gunshot, asthmatic attacks. They were also educated on the proper way to administer Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and how to prepare and administer Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), using salt, sugar, and water for conditions such as stooling and vomiting. Afterwards, they had an interactive tour of the university library where they experienced the interactive smart board as well as its usage, the innovative library unit and how to access library facilities.

Other activities for the teens included a 'March for Peace in Africa' within the university campus, a spelling bee, and a leadership training anchored by the Centre Leader, Professor Emeka E. Oguzie. The remarkable teens did not only enjoy every moment of the program but also showcased incredible dedication, hard work, and consistency.



A resource person educating the teens on green corrosion techniques using the gasometric method to observe hydrogen evolution



Biogas production by anaerobic co-digestion of plant waste and cow rumen waste done by ACE-Teens

## ...Financing Energy Transition for Sustainable Development

Cognisant of the need for sustainable energy financing, ACE-FUELS along with other energy stakeholders held a dialogue to enhance Africa's efforts at sustainable energy financing, at the Africa Climate Forum held recently in Abuja.

Recognising that the global transition from fossil fuels to cleaner and more sustainable sources of energy, such as renewables; solar, wind, hydro, nuclear power and improved energy efficiency have become an urgent need, the forum however noted that the energy transition process requires that certain critical issues be addressed for its success. One of these issues is financing.

Stakeholders in Africa have identified that financing the energy transition for sustainable progress is crucial for addressing climate change and achieving a more sustainable future.

Making a presentation during the event, tagged, “Powering the Future: Financing Energy Transition for Sustainable Development”, Professor Oguzie, observed that the critical role of gas in Nigeria’s energy transition plan implies that the country must decarbonise its energy sector through carbon capture, utilisation and storage technologies.

ACE-FUELS is at the forefront of efforts to fill a growing education, skills and information gap in the field of renewable and other clean energy sources within the subregion and aims to address the regional development challenge of poor availability and poor access to energy. The Centre continues to engage with government and industry stakeholders to set materials research priority areas and targets and to guide and focus research, development, and innovation activities to achieve the energy transition and decarbonisation targets of the Federal Government.

ACE-FUELS offers short and certificate courses on energy transition and renewable energy technologies which are designed

to develop the knowledge and capacity of participants to understand the adverse impacts of conventional energy systems and to identify the pathway towards energy transition and renewables.

As part of its commitment to engaging with relevant stakeholders to glean best practices, the Centre also featured at the inaugural research symposium of the new Carbon-to-metals Coating Institute at Queen’s University in Kingston, Canada, where the Centre Leader delivered a keynote lecture, titled “Natural Products for Materials Protection.” Professor Oguzie highlighted the ground-breaking research efforts of the corrosion research group at ACE-FUELS on green anticorrosion additives from biomass extracts.

The Carbon-to-Metals Coating Institute is a multidisciplinary and multi-institutional project, with a mandate to find new ways to prevent the corrosion of metallic infrastructure. The institute and ACE-FUELS are part of a global collaborative project tagged ‘Excellence of Canadian corrosion education through internationalisation, equity, and interdisciplinarity.’

The Centre Leader also visited the laboratory of Professor Yoland Hedberg, the Principal Investigator of the CORRECT Project at Western University, as well as the state-of-the-art Surface Science Western and the Clean Energy Research Laboratory of Professor Ibrahim Dincer at Ontario Tech. University.

# CIVIL SERVICE TO CONSIDER SPECIAL PLACEMENT FOR SPESSE GRADUATES

*By Obiajuru Ananyi*



Permanent Secretary, OHCSF, Mr Oloruntola Michael (centre), flanked on his right by the former SPESSE TTL, Mr Ikechukwu Nweje, and National Project Coordinator, SPESSE, Dr Joshua Atah, and other members of the World Bank/NUC/SPESSEs delegation during the visit to the OHCSF

The Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (OHCSF) has expressed readiness to create special cadres for present and future career civil servants trained under the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE) Project.

This is however subject to meeting the requirements and providing justifications for the creation of the Environmental and Social Standards cadres in the Scheme of Service.

Permanent Secretary, Service Policies and Strategies Office (SPSO), OHCSF, Mr Oloruntola Michael, made this known while welcoming a delegation of the National Universities Commission (NUC), the World Bank and other stakeholders of the SPESSE Project on behalf of the Head of Service of the Federation, Dr Folasade Yemi-Esan.

The team came on an advocacy visit, following the Mid Term Review (MTR) for SPESSE, to brief the Permanent Secretary on the activities of the Project

and to get feedback from the OHCSF on the request by stakeholders for the creation of cadres in Environmental and Social Standards in the Scheme of Service.

Disclosing that similar cadres already exist in the Scheme of Service, the Permanent Secretary informed the team that graduates from programmes offered in Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards can be absorbed by the similar cadres that already exist. “However, if stakeholders of the SPESSE Project insist that they want separate cadres for courses offered in the Project, they should write a memo through the Federal Ministries of Environment and Women Affairs for onward transmission to the meeting of the National Council of Establishments (NCE), for consideration,” he explained.

Immediate past World Bank Task Team Lead (TTL) on the SPESSE Project, Ikechukwu Nweje, thanked the OHCSF for the reception given to the team and disclosed that SPESSE is coordinated by the NUC and financed with a loan from the World Bank. Mr Nweje pointed out the need to provide more training in the fields of Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards in Nigeria so that the country would not depend on foreigners for those skills. He also emphasised the need to create cadres in the Scheme of Service in those fields and appealed to the OHCSF for support to ensure that the cadres were created.

The former TTL informed the Permanent Secretary of the different tracks (programmes) offered on the SPESSE Project across the three thematic areas including executive short courses (Track A), advanced certificate courses (Track B), and postgraduate diplomas (Track C).

Others are master’s programmes (Track D) and BSc programmes (Track E).

National Coordinator of the SPESSE Project and NUC Coordinator, Special Projects, Dr Joshua Atah, noted that a cadre already exists for Procurement in the Scheme of Service and the NUC had been engaging with the OHCSF regarding the creation of cadres for Environmental and Social Standards component. Dr Atah added that SPESSE Centres of Excellence in universities were created to train students and that the curricula were developed by relevant project stakeholders.

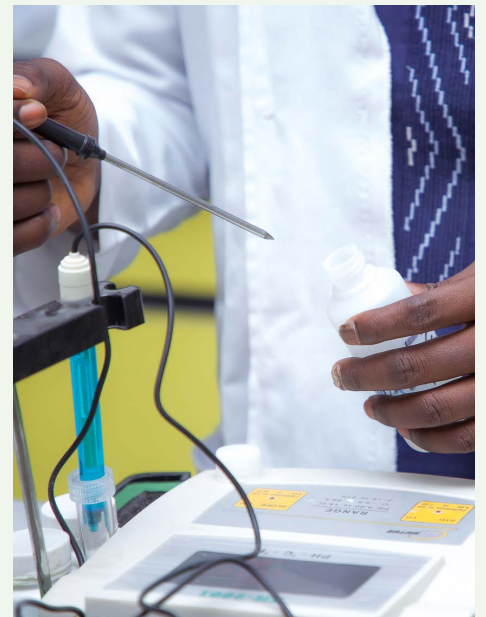
Dr Atah stated that courses offered in the project are free for civil servants within the lifespan of funding by the World Bank. Courses offered under the undergraduate component are published in the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) brochure and graduates will be certified by the Bureau of Public Procurement, the Federal Ministry of Environment and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs for Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards programmes, respectively. He added that SPESSE adopts a blended model of lecture delivery which means that students who because of the exigencies of work may not be able to attend physical classes have the option of taking classes online.

Emphasising the impact of the SPESSE Project, Centre Leader of the SPESSE Centre at the Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi (JOSTUM), Benue State, Professor Lami Nnamonu, informed the OHCSF that 225 staff of the Federal Capital Development Authority have been trained in the three components under the SPESSE project and that more civil servants would be trained in the course of the project.



# **CDA** STUDENT WINS GLOBAL AWARD FOR CONTRIBUTING TO SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

*By Nura Garba*





A PhD student of the Centre for Dryland Agriculture (CDA), Rehema Mrutu, has won a global award for her contributions towards ensuring a sustainable future. Rehema is a Tanzanian pursuing a degree in Natural Resource Management and Climate Change at CDA, a Centre of Excellence under the Bayero University Kano, Nigeria, and she will receive a research grant of USD 14,000 for a six-month research stay at the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology of the University of Connecticut in the USA.

This feat followed a competitive selection process at the Climate, Food and Farming Global Research Alliance Development (CLIFF-GRADS) Award announced at COP28 in Dubai. CLIFF-GRADS is a joint initiative of the Mitigate+: Research for Low Emissions Food Systems of the CGIAR and the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GRA). “This award aims to advance one of my research objectives on developing cheap and efficient means to divert the key substrate and hydrogen

in methane production to acetic acid. This data is urgently needed for researchers to decide on which microorganisms in the rumen need manipulation to both develop long-term methane mitigation measures and ensure food security.”

Rehema’s research focus at CDA is aimed at developing a Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats-engineered strain of a methane-producing organism (methanogen) that subverts methane production for acetic acid generation, which is a by-product that can be used by the cow to improve meat and milk production, while reducing greenhouse gas (methane) emission. Part of her job is also to understand what and how many species of methanogens

reside within the rumen. This is extremely useful in designing microbial-based animal breeding mitigation strategies.

Rehema Mrutu seeks to achieve a lot on the global scene regarding climate sustainability and she hopes to develop the spirit of collegiality and collaboration with scientists across the globe and various disciplines.

Last year, Rehema was nominated by CDA to participate in a high-level meeting of the Africa Centre of Excellence (ACE) at the World Bank’s headquarters in the USA. She had rich discussions with the World Bank President, David Malpass, and talked about her research to a wider audience. These conversations attracted



Award recipient, Ms Rehema Mrutu, conducting research in one of CDA’s laboratories



Students of CDA working in one of the Centre's greenhouses

collaborators including Dr Natalie Farny with whom she currently works at the gene engineering laboratory at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI).

## ... Centre Unveils Improved Composite Sorghum Flour

CDA also unveiled a new and improved composite sorghum flour as part of research recently conducted for healthy living and consumption. This improved sorghum flour is a healthy meal option for

diabetic patients and others with health challenges.

The research which is funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) AgriFood Africa Innovation Awards Round 6, is a collaborative project by CDA, the University of Reading, UK, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), and Tazij Nigeria Limited.

Briefing journalists on the outcome of the research, the CDA Director, Professor Jibrin Mohammed Jibrin, said the research was aimed at promoting indigenous foods considering the tremendous impact of these food items on the health of citizens and their attempts at healthy living. He added that the nutrient-rich sorghum would promote food security in Nigeria and across West and Central Africa. According to Professor Jibrin, "Sorghum is rich in vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, and antioxidants which aid the natural cure of diabetes, lower cholesterol, and boost energy.

Sorghum also contains iron, magnesium and copper which help in blood circulation to prevent

anaemia." The CDA Director said the research was initiated to address grassroots challenges confronting sorghum cultivation as well as reduce the importation of the grains.

CDA lead researcher, Dr Hakeem Ajeigbe, said the advocacy on sorghum production and consumption would increase economic prosperity and address challenges in food processing, distribution and storage. He said the research focused on improving the availability and accessibility of safe, healthy, nutritious and sustainable local food. Speaking on the many benefits of sorghum, Country Director, ICRISAT, Dr Ignatius Angarawai, also appealed to the general public to desist from consuming hybrid food, because of its propensity to cause cancer.



A member of the CDA faculty delivering a lecture to some students of the Centre

# SPE SSE-ATBU

## RUNNING SEAMLESSLY

*By Andee Iheme*



An aerial view of the SPE SSE Centre of Excellence in Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi

**A**mid prevalent industrial actions and their disruptions on the academic calendars of public universities, it is most gratifying to note that the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPE SSE) Project at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, continues to offer seamless and undisrupted programmes to candidates pursuing academic and professional master's degrees as well as postgraduate diplomas in the three thematic areas of Procurement, Environmental Standards, and Social Standards.

This development underlines the place of foresight and strategic planning

demonstrated by the World Bank, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the Centres of Excellence and other key stakeholders by including the “No Strike” conditionality in the agreement signed by the participating universities under the SPE SSE Project. SPE SSE is a World Bank-supported initiative which aims to develop sustainable capacity in managing procurement, environment and social safeguards in the public sector.

One of the biggest enablers of the ATBU SPE SSE Centre of Excellence is the total commitment of the university management to the project. Beyond just declarative statements, any casual observer will observe its support in practical terms.

The Centre enjoys the municipal facilities and services of the university as well as the needed unfettered independence to run the Project. Without this level of freedom to operate, such projects have been known to be enmeshed in distractive and dysfunctional boardroom politics that marooned them.

At ATBU, the Vice-Chancellor and his Senate fully appreciate the enormous value of the SPESSE Project not just to the university and Bauchi State, but to the entire North-East sub-region of Nigeria. One finds an expression of this appreciation in the university's involvement in the project's advocacy efforts. With its weight behind the Project, the necessary credibility and believability factor have been leveraged by the SPESSE Project to prosper in the state and the entire sub-region. This has been further enhanced by the unencumbered and seamless conclusion of the project's short courses. Now, prospective candidates of these courses run by the ATBU-SPESSCE know that it is possible to start

and finish an academic programme in a Nigerian university without any hiccups. Perhaps, SPESSE represents and symbolises a national effort to boost the reputation of the Nigeria University System (NUS).

Vice-Chancellor of ATBU, Professor Mohammad Ahmad AbdulAzeez, said that SPESSE has challenged the university to revisit its mode of teaching and examining students. He stated that the advanced technology deployed in the university, through the SPESSE Project has greatly improved internet connectivity within the university and has proven the efficiency of both virtual and physical modes of lecture delivery and examination writing. This, he said, has encouraged ATBU to consider expanding the frontiers of its academic activities by adopting a blended system of lecture delivery.

With the quality of emerging professionals now in the field, procurement processes are bound to be aligned with global best practices in stemming the increasing tide of corruption in Nigeria. In the same vein, the

environmental sector, in the face of global warming and other challenges will now begin to receive expert attention with a corps of available professionals. The same applies to social standards which will address those time-honoured ethical values that have helped to check-mate and forestall a slide into a state of anarchy. About 1500 professionals who passed through the short courses at the ATBU Centre of Excellence are already primed to make a difference.

The SPESSE Project has become a major disruptive agent in transforming the traditional ways things are done in the university system. It has now been proven that the dual mode of delivering lectures and examinations is possible in our conventional universities. The triple helix system of education involving the universities, government and industry in tackling the challenges of society has also been instituted and activated in realising the mandate of the project at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi. The university has gone into partnership with some key industry players and MDAs, locally and



Some students of the ATBU SPESSE Centre of Excellence sitting for examinations in one of the Centre's multipurpose auditoriums

internationally, to deepen and widen the gains of the SPESSE Project in the university. Some local organisations with which ATBU has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) include Samson Opaluwah

Consults Ltd, Project Procurement Consults Ltd, Fismas Consults Ltd, and Community Initiative for The Promotion of Health and Education Sector (CIPRHES).

With the SPESSE Project, ATBU, Bauchi is winning. So far, so good!

# ACEGID BOOSTS GENOMICS SEQUENCING CAPACITY WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART SEQUENCING MACHINES

By Fikayo Oyewale

The Africa Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases (ACEGID) has significantly enhanced its genome sequencing capacity by acquiring two ground-breaking sequencing machines: the Illumina NovaSeq X Plus and the PacBio Sequel II e. These cutting-edge instruments will revolutionise the Centre's research capabilities, allowing it to explore the mysteries of life with unprecedented clarity and depth. This equipment was unveiled at the ACEGID Genomics Centre at Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria.

“ACEGID continues to invest in state-of-the-art

equipment simply because we are a reference centre for health research and innovation in Africa”, said Professor Christian Happi, the Centre Director, who added that “Investing in these pieces of equipment will put us in an advantageous position so that we can innovate, create, and bring forth novel solutions to the issues confronting the continent.”

## *Illumina NovaSeq X Plus: High-Throughput Sequencing Powerhouse*

The Illumina NovaSeq X Plus is a powerhouse of sequencing throughput. This machine can generate billions of reads per run, enabling ACEGID to conduct large-scale studies with unparalleled efficiency.

With the Illumina NovaSeq X Plus, the Centre will be able to:

- Perform large-scale population studies: Analyse





PacBio  
Sequel II e

genetic variations across diverse populations to identify disease-associated genes and understand the genetic basis of complex traits.

- Accelerate clinical research: Conduct large-scale clinical trials and genomic profiling of patients to develop personalised medicine strategies.
- Explore the microbial world: Sequence the genomes of entire microbial communities to understand their role in health, disease, and environmental processes through metagenomics.

## *PacBio Sequel II e: Unlocking Long-Read Accuracy*

The PacBio Sequel II e is a marvel of modern engineering. It utilises single-molecule real-time (SMRT) sequencing technology to generate long reads, often exceeding 30,000 bases in length. This remarkable feature allows the user to delve deeper into the complexities of genomes, resolving previously ambiguous regions and uncovering hidden variations.

With the PacBio Sequel II e, ACEGID will be able to:

- Assemble complete genomes with greater accuracy. Long reads will enable the Centre to bridge gaps in traditional assemblies, leading to more accurate and comprehensive representations of genomes.
- Characterise complex genomic regions. Repetitive sequences and structural variations often pose challenges for short-read sequencing. The PacBio Sequel II e



NovaSeq  
X Plus

will allow ACEGID to analyse these regions confidently, unlocking valuable insights.

- Study transcriptomes with unprecedented detail. Long reads provide a clearer picture of RNA isoform diversity and alternative splicing events, deepening researchers' understanding of gene expression.

## *A New Era of Discovery*

The acquisition of these two remarkable machines marks a significant milestone for ACEGID's genomics research work. The complementary nature of long-read and short-read technologies equips the Centre with a holistic approach to genomic exploration. By combining the strengths of both instruments, ACEGID can now unravel the intricacies of the genome with a level of precision and efficiency previously deemed unattainable. The Illumina NovaSeq X Plus and the PacBio Sequel II e will enable ACEGID to make groundbreaking discoveries in human health, disease, and evolution.

"The investment in the Illumina NovaSeq X Plus and the PacBio Sequel II is important because we are embarking on human genomic sequencing. And human genome sequence requires for you to do both short-reads through Illumina NovaSeq X Plus and long-reads through the PacBio Sequel II e," said an excited Professor Happi.

As the Centre integrates these state-of-the-art sequencers into its research work, the possibilities are as vast as the genome itself. From deciphering the genomic basis of diseases to unlocking the secrets of biodiversity, the Centre's laboratory is poised to make ground-breaking contributions to the scientific community.

"We intend, in the next two years, to sequence over 100,000 human genomes. That required this investment so that we can not only show that this can be done in Africa, but that it can be done with the best tools possible. Eventually, we want to show the competitiveness of this continent and show that good science can be done in Africa," Professor Happi concluded.

ACEGID was founded in 2014 through the World Bank-funded Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) Project. Now in its second phase, the ACE Impact project aims to empower the centres of excellence to be regional development powerhouses by boosting the quality and impact of their training and research, enhancing infrastructure, forging partnerships for real-world relevance, elevating education standards through collaborations, and optimising its internal operations for effectiveness.

ACEGID is thrilled to embark on this exciting journey of scientific exploration and share its discoveries with the world. The Centre promises periodic updates on its ongoing research endeavours and the groundbreaking discoveries it makes with the Illumina NovaSeq X Plus and the PacBio Sequel II e.





Former DG of BPP, Mr Mamman Ahmadu (7th left) with the team from the NUC, World Bank, Centres of Excellence and the implementing agencies, during the visit to the bureau as part of the MTR for the SPESSE Project

# BPP, SPESSE COLLABORATE ON CERTIFICATION OF PROCUREMENT PROFESSIONALS

*By Janet McDickson*

The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) has committed to working with the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement Centres of Excellence (SPESSEs) to develop and deploy certification courses for procurement professionals.

This commitment was given by the immediate past Director-General of the bureau, Mamman Ahmadu, when a delegation from the World Bank, the National Universities Commission (NUC), and the SPESSEs paid him an advocacy visit as part of the Mid-Term Review of the SPESSE Project. The former Director-General disclosed that although the BPP is also partnering with the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS), UK to develop content for the programme, it would also work with the Centres of Excellence to develop and deploy the local content for the certification course. He assured them that though the procurement process for the development of the certification portal had just commenced, the portal would be ready for launch in no time. Ahmadu hailed efforts at capacity building by the World Bank/Federal Government of Nigeria-supported SPESSE Project coordinated by the NUC. He added that the development of the procurement sector is a pointer to



(l-r) National Project Coordinator, SPESSE, Dr Joshua Atah; World Bank Safeguards Consultant, Seifu Mehari; Centre Leader, ATBU-SPESSCE, Prof. Ibrahim H. Garba; former TTL, SPESSE, Ikechukwu Nweje; Centre Leader, CIPESS-JOSTUM, Prof. Lami Nnamonu; and World Bank Procurement Specialist, Barbara Ziokowska, during the visit to the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP)

sustainable procurement processes and viable economic development for the country.

Considering the time left before the expiration of funding from the World Bank vis-à-vis the work yet to be done, the former DG requested an extension to ensure that implementation challenges are addressed, and project objectives are achieved.

National Project Coordinator and representative of the NUC, Dr Joshua Atah, explained that SPESSE is a capacity-building project in Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards and that the six participating Centres of Excellence were selected on merit. He said that approval had been given to the universities by NUC to commence undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Sustainable Procurement, Environmental and Social Standards courses, adding that, in line with the NUC's tripartite relationship with the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), both organisations had been formally notified of the NUC's approval.

"In the next four years, Dr Atah said, Nigeria will expect to see graduates from these courses. Also, the NUC is working with the Centres of Excellence to commence PhD programmes in all three thematic areas to produce professionals with the requisite skills and competencies", Dr Atah said and advised all stakeholders to work hard to ensure that Project Development Objectives (PDOs) are achieved.

Representatives from four of the six Centres of Excellence gave progress reports on the SPESSE Project and its positive impact on society with the short courses offered in all three thematic areas.

Senior Public Sector Specialist and the then World Bank Task Team Leader on the SPESSE Project, Mr Ikechukwu John Nweje, stated that there was stiff competition among existing projects for available limited resources. He acknowledged the progress made and challenges encountered with project implementation and appealed to all stakeholders to speed up the implementation of the project considering the imminent project closure.

# ACE-SPED EMPOWERS STUDENTS TO SOLVE POWER CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

*By Inya Agha Egwu*



Some students of ACE-SPED during their internship

**A**s countries in Sub-Saharan Africa struggle to develop and maintain a reliable energy and power system due to a shortage of highly skilled manpower to provide accessible, affordable, and sustainable power, the Africa Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Power, Energy and Development (ACE-SPED) offers an opportunity for Africans to address these energy challenges, using local resources.

Established in 2019 with support from the World Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD), ACE-SPED has demonstrated its capacity to train African students who will provide practical evidence-based practical solutions regarding electricity generation and supply in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Centre is domiciled in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), where it offers PhD and Masters degree programmes focused on five thematic areas, namely electric power systems development, renewable energy, waste-to-energy and energy conservation, energy resources assessment and forecasting, sustainable energy materials, and energy policy, regulation and management.

With all its programmes accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC), ACE-SPED has, so far, enrolled a total of 251 students, 35 of whom are regional students from different African countries. The Centre has graduated about 35 masters degree students who are making a positive impact in their various countries.

“We have surpassed expectations in the number of regional students our centre is forecast to host. This is a clear indication that our efforts are recognised in the region”, the Director of ACE-SPED, Professor Emenike Ejiogu, said. He added that the Centre is unique because of its capacity to domesticate energy solutions and conduct impact-based research projects. “Research at ACE-SPED is not hinged on imported materials but on local materials that adapt to the peculiarity of the African environment”, Professor Ejiogu said. Within the past five years, ACE-SPED has used locally sourced materials to develop insulators that can be used for high-voltage electricity lines.

In response to the electricity needs of its host university, the Centre partnered with the Laboratory of Industrial

Electronics, Power Devices and New Energy Systems (LIEPNES) to develop a 500KVA refuse-derived fuel gasifier plant to supply electricity to the administration block and other adjoining buildings within the campus. The Centre also installed a 100KVA solar mini-grid system which serves as a training facility for students as well as a source of electricity to proximate buildings.

To boost internet services on the university campuses, ACE-SPED added 1Gigabit internet bandwidth and assisted the university in laying fibre optic cables to connect classrooms, laboratories and offices in the Faculty of Engineering to the UNN data centre.

Being a student at ACE-SPED is an opportunity to benefit from study grants, exchange programmes and internship placements which are derived from the Centre’s many partnerships/ collaborations with relevant industries. In 2022, the Centre attracted a European



(l-r) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), UNN, Prof. Johnson Urama; Ag Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Romanus Ezeokonkwo; Centre Leader, ACE-SPED, Prof. Emenike Ejiogu; immediate past Vice-Chancellor of UNN, Prof. Arizechukwu Igwe, the Deputy Registrar of the University, Dr (Mrs) Celine Nebedum, and other staff of the Centre, during the commissioning of ACE-SPED's new building

Union-funded grant valued at €52,000 to train 11 young Africans from ECOWAS countries on various energy courses. Similarly, in 2023, through the Transforming Energy Access Partnerships (TEA-LP), ACE-SPED received a grant of £19,700 from the University of Cape Town to train 18 young Africans on energy access and mini-grid development. Eight students of the Centre also participated in short-term courses outside Nigeria through a mobility programme with the West Africa Centres of Excellence in Energy Network

(WACEENET), while an additional 30 students and three experts also received training abroad to develop their competencies in digital education, through the Centre of Competence on Digital Education (C-CODE) programme sponsored by the World Bank.

With over 50 industrial partners providing advisory services to the Centre, students at ACE-SPED are easily absorbed by the partners for internships. The Centre's most recent partners include the National

Power Training Institute of Nigeria (NAPTIN), and the West Africa Power Pool following the signing of memoranda of understanding with the Centre.

As ACE-SPED's programmes gain popularity within Sub-Saharan Africa, the Vice-Chancellor of UNN, Professor Charles Arizechukwu Igwe, assures of the university administration's commitment to the success of the centre.

# CIPESS-JOSTUM, TRANSFORMING CAREERS, IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

*By Uche Michael*



Centre Leader, CIPESS, JOSTUM, Prof. Lami Nnamonu (centre) with some members of the CIPESS Management team and graduates of the Centre's advanced certificate courses which took place in Abuja

“ After completing the short course (Track ‘A’) in Procurement, I sat for promotion exams in my organisation. During the interview session, I was asked if I had attended any training or course in Procurement and I said yes, and I was asked to provide evidence. I presented the certificates from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi’s (JOSTUM)

Centre for Innovation in Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards (CIPESS) study centre.

There and then, I was recommended for promotion to the rank of Principal Procurement Officer. Before my promotion, I worked in the Stores Unit in my organisation but with my newly

acquired new skills, I was deployed to the Procurement Department with new functions based on my new skills in Procurement Standards.” This is the testimony of Makar Dominic Orduen, a participant in the Procurement Standards short executive course (Track A) offered by CIPESS. His is one of the many stories of how CIPESS-JOSTUM is leading the transformation in people’s careers while improving society socially and environmentally.

From far away Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State, Pogu Peter Joshua recounted the impact of the project on his career progression with the completion of a Track A course at the Centre. “I got three job offers and I accepted one from an American organisation in Nigeria as an Operations Officer handling procurement and other supply chain functions. I was also promoted to a country roving Procurement and Logistics Officer.” His story implies that though located in Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, to champion the cause of addressing the human capacity deficit for sustainable development in north-central Nigeria, the multiethnic nature of Benue State has made it possible for the project to impact not just indigenes of the state but also other ethnic groups across Nigeria who visit or are settled in the State.

Angwe Louis Mlumun was a Track A participant in Environmental Standards, and she says “After taking short courses with CIPESS, I got a new job to work as an Environmental Specialist on a World Bank-sponsored programme, Ng-Cares, and I appreciate the CIPESS team for giving me such an opportunity.” Angwe Louis is saddled with the new responsibility of carrying out an environmental assessment on Small and Medium Scale



Centre Leader, Prof. Lami Nnamonu, addressing candidates during the graduation ceremony for the CIPESS advanced certificate programme as which took place in Abuja

Enterprises (SMEs) to be given grants by the programme and monitoring to ensure that they adhere to the World Bank’s Environmental Standards guidelines as well as state and national laws.

In the same vein, Oyewale Tolulope Janet said, “With my certificate, I was able to secure a job at Elitecare Medical and Diagnostic Services Limited as their procurement officer. I am the head of the procurement unit at the company, and I oversee their reagents and equipment procurement.

It is worth noting that CIPESS has had several seasoned and highly skilled trainees and trainers who were already making tremendous contributions to society but saw the SPESSE project as an opportunity to upskill and add gain more knowledge.

For instance, Ajekwe Daniel Asoo, a Track A participant of Environmental Standards Cohort 7, was a highly experienced and dedicated staff of RIFAD AFRICA and was National Coordinator 2 in Nigeria. Before his current role, Mr Ajekwe had contributed to organisations such as The Scout Association of Nigeria-Benue State, Oriented Leadership Foundation, One2One Healthcare, and APIN/PERFAR. He has this to say about CIPESS:

“Participating in Track ‘A’, Environmental Standards Cohort 7, has transformed my academic and professional journey. The exposure to cutting-edge research and exceptional facilitators has honed my skills, and I’m grateful for the opportunities, propelling me towards a future of excellence and positive impact. It’s inspiring to see the commitment to enhancing education and workforce transition. CIPESS’s efforts in improving training content and study conditions through feedback mechanisms demonstrate a dedication to providing a holistic learning experience. The inclusion of the World Bank’s Tracers programme also reflects a strategic approach to measuring the impact of the initiative, contributing valuable insights for future improvements. Collaborating with the National Universities Commission (NUC) to review programmes and align them with industry standards further shows a forward-thinking mindset. Keep pushing for innovation and responsiveness in education – your work has the potential to positively influence policies and bridge the gap between academia and the labour market.”

A retired Director with the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) said, “I’m Simon B. Joshua, an accredited Environmental Consultant and CEO of

Tangwat International Limited. I was invited by CIPESS for the three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop from 2-4 May 2023 where I was appointed as a part-time facilitator for the Environmental Standards (ES) field. I’ve been impacted by these engagements with CIPESS-JOSTUM I’ve had cause to review many reports which I authored and edited in the past and I feel that those reports would have been better, had I gone through this experience with CIPESS. This is a worthwhile and timely venture. Being a facilitator in three other Centres of Excellence, I commend the great effort and penetrative strategies adopted by the CIPESS-JOSTUM team.”

SPESSCE Centres of Excellence (SPESSCEs), situated across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria have a primary responsibility of ensuring human capacity development across the country. In keeping with that mandate, CIPESS, which occupies the seat for the North Central region, had, as of November 2023, established and run study centres in the six states of the North Central Zone and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Workplace sexual harassment is continually pervasive and CIPESS has taken time to create and maintain a sexual harassment policy not only to help protect employees or participants from unwanted sexual advances or inappropriate conduct but to also help the Centre resolve potential issues before they escalate into costly litigations. CIPESS has ensured the establishment of transparent, accessible, and culturally appropriate grievance redress mechanisms to ensure that affected parties have a voice and their rights are protected. These mechanisms provide affected stakeholders with a platform to raise concerns, seek redress, and hold project implementers accountable. The constitution



Graduates of the CIPESS executive short course which was conducted in Kogi State



of a grievance redress committee by the Centre management and the provision of complaint boxes within the premises of the Centre are cases in point.

CIPESS's impact on its host university, JOSTUM, cannot be overemphasised. The university has benefited immensely in areas of infrastructural development, capacity building of staff, increased partnerships and visibility of the university. The installation of High-Performance Computing (HPC) and a Learning Management System (LMS) by the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) also successfully ushered in the era of online teaching and learning in CIPESS and, by extension, the university. A significant impact of this mighty step is the creation of a window for the re-internationalisation of the university since CIPESS courses will be open to intending participants beyond the shores of Nigeria.

To achieve more results and pave the way for project sustainability, CIPESS plans to continue online facilitation, onboard students from the sub-region (Gambia, Liberia, etc), and pursue international accreditation. It also plans to formalise and strengthen key partnerships, facilitate stakeholder engagements and publicity, and track its alumni (impact and outcome).

With the vision to be a dynamic regional hub for expert training and research in Procurement, Environmental and Social Standards (PES) based on global best practices, CIPESS-JOSTUM continues to exert profound influence within its area of coverage. The Centre continues to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, and mindset necessary to adapt and thrive in this rapidly changing environment. CIPESS is committed to ensuring that individuals are not only equipped with technical skills but



CIPESS Deputy Centre Leader (Environmental Standards), Prof. Rufus Sha'ato, presenting a certificate to a graduate of the CIPESS advanced certificate course which was conducted in Abuja

also with critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication abilities. This is to enable them to understand complex issues, generate innovative ideas, and collaborate effectively with others. By training and educating people, CIPESS has created a skilled and flexible workforce that can meet the evolving needs of industries as well as contribute to job creation, reduce corruption, and stimulate economic stability. Today, the Centre has trained over 5000 individuals in executive and advanced certificate courses.

CIPESS attributes its success to its team's unflinching enthusiasm for achieving results engineered by passion and dedication. The Centre's optimal performance in terms of capacity building, procurement activities, financial management, infrastructural development as well as other critical aspects of the aspects are indicators of a thriving project.

Until the full potentials of the project are met, there is no end in sight!

# ACENTDFB'S BIOCHEMISTRY PROGRAMMES GAIN INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

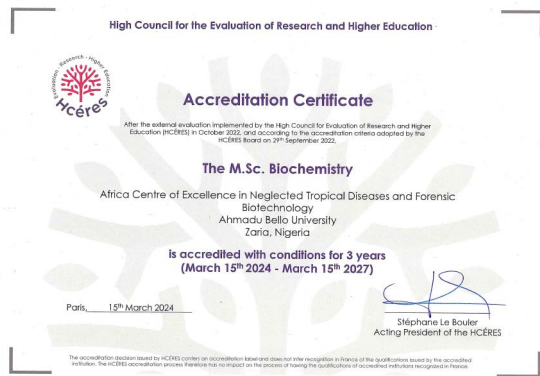
*By Murjanatu M. Abba*

The Africa Centre of Excellence for Neglected Tropical Diseases and Forensic Biotechnology (ACENTDFB) of the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, has, once again, received significant recognition from the prestigious Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCÉRES), an international accreditation body located in France. This time around, it is in recognition of the Centre's suitability to offer the MSc and PhD Biochemistry programmes for three and five-year periods, spanning 15 March 2024 to 15 March 2027 (for the MSc programme) and 15 March 2029 (for the PhD component).

This announcement was conveyed in an email addressed to the

The image shows a large, modern, two-story building with a light beige facade and dark window frames. The building is surrounded by a paved courtyard. A dark blue SUV is parked in the courtyard. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The building has a sign that reads "AFRICA CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES AND FORENSIC BIOTECHNOLOGY" and a logo of the Ahmadu Bello University.

Front view of the Africa Centre of Excellence for Neglected Tropical Diseases and Forensic Biotechnology, domiciled in ABU, Zaria



A copy of the accreditation certificate issued by the Paris-based Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) to ACENTDFB for its MSc Biochemistry programme



A copy of the accreditation certificate from HCERES approving ACENTDFB's PhD Biochemistry programme to run for five years

ACENTDFB Centre Leader, Professor Y. K. E. Ibrahim, from the HCÉRES Project Manager, Mr Zakia Mestari. He stated that following a meeting of the accreditation commission on 29 February, both programmes from ACENTDFB - MSc and PhD Biochemistry - have been accredited for three years and five years, respectively

This accreditation marks a significant milestone for ACENTDFB, following a rigorous international accreditation exercise conducted by HCÉRES in August 2023 at the National Universities Commission (NUC), Abuja.

It will be recalled that in 2019, MSc and PhD programmes offered by the Centre under the first phase of the ACE Project, tagged ACE 1, were accredited by both HCÉRES and the Royal Society of Biology (RSB).

Conveying his delight in an email to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Kabiru Bala, the Centre Leader of ACENTDFB said, "I am happy to report that the MSc and PhD Biochemistry programmes we put forward for international accreditation have scaled through. The two programmes have received full accreditation status: the MSc for three years and the PhD for five years." He also thanked everyone who supported the Centre in achieving this remarkable feat.

## *... Centre Staff Shine at ABU Outstanding Performance Awards*

In keeping with the Centre's commitment to excellence, four members of its staff were honoured with the ABU Zaria Outstanding Performance Award. The awards were presented by the Vice-Chancellor of the University, during a ceremony held as part of events marking ABU, Zaria's 43rd convocation.

At the forefront of these commendations was Professor YKE Ibrahim, who achieved a remarkable feat by clinching two prestigious awards, the Grand Fellow of

the Year and the Overall Grant Fellow of the Year. Professor Ibrahim's exceptional contributions and leadership were lauded, showcasing his dedication to advancing the centre's goals.

Other distinguished staff members from ACENTDFB who were also recognised for their outstanding contributions to their respective fields include Professors Hussaina Makun and Emmanuel Balogun who received the Grand Fellow of the Year awards from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Faculty of Life Sciences, respectively, for their notable achievements in their fields.

Dr Mohammed Auwal Ibrahim also received the Most Cited Staff of the Year award from the Faculty of Life Sciences, highlighting his significant impact and influence in the academic community.

The awards ceremony served as a platform to celebrate and acknowledge the exceptional accomplishments of ABU Zaria staff members. These accolades reflect the commitment and expertise within ACENTDFB and underscore the vital role played by the centre's staff members in advancing research and academic excellence in the university in general.

# ENVIRONMENT MINISTER APPLAUDS FREE TRAINING FOR CIVIL SERVANTS BY SPESSE

*By Soala Martyns-Yellowe*



(l-r) Honourable Minister of Environment, His Excellency, Balarabe Abbass Lawal, former SPESSE TTL, Ikechukwu Nweje, and co-TTL, Social Standards, Michael Ilesanmi, during the visit to the Honourable Minister of Environment as part of the SPESSE MTR exercise

**T**he Minister of Environment, Balarabe Abbass Lawal, has commended the decision of the World Bank-supported Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE) Project to train Nigerian civil servants for free. The Minister gave the commendation when he received

a delegation led by the immediate past World Bank Task Team Leader (TTL) on the SPESSE Project, Mr Ikechukwu Nweje, on an advocacy visit to the ministry. The visit was part of the activities marking the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the SPESSE Project and it aimed to discuss the ministry's responsibility on the project.



A cross section of participants during the visit to the Minister



The Honourable Minister with some stakeholders of the SPESSE Project during the visit to the Ministry

Addressing the delegation which also had the National Coordinator of the SPESSE Project, Dr Joshua Atah, and the Centre Leaders of the six SPESSE Centres of Excellence (SPESSEs), the Minister emphasised the priority that the ministry is giving to the training of officers within the Ministry. He advocated for a greater focus on training professionals on Environmental Standards and expressed delight that civil servants were allowed to participate in the training without paying fees.

The Minister acknowledged the team's dedication and the project's laudable objectives. He underscored the need for a systemic approach to professionalise the environment sector and recognised the SPESSE Project as a vehicle for positive change. He encouraged broad participation in the trainings of the Centres of Excellence, especially in the environmental thematic area, urging continued collaboration, and expressing a desire for the project's lifecycle to be reviewed for an extension.

The former TTL, who presented a comprehensive overview of the project's progress and achievements, articulated the purpose of the MTR, emphasising its role in reassessing the project's trajectory and identifying areas for improvement by the

Ministry. Mr Nweje emphasised the risk of delays in launching the certification portal for Environmental Standards which is pivotal to the success of the project. He expressed appreciation at the ministry's efforts in ensuring that the portal is launched, and highlighted the project's transformative potential in the fields of procurement, environmental, and social standards. Assuring the Minister of the World Bank's commitment to supporting the ministry to deliver on its responsibilities, Mr. Nweje called for the continued dedication of the government to the success of the SPESSE Project.

Reiterating the importance of the certification portal to the project's success, the National Project Coordinator emphasised the need for government budgetary support beyond project closure. He suggested a long-term sustainability plan, including the provision of office space and skilled personnel to manage the environment node of the project. He expressed delight at the Minister's engagement and support.

The Coordinator of the Environment Node, Mrs Rofikat Odetoro, highlighted challenges experienced by the environment node in project implementation as well as its achievements.

# ACE-PUTOR COMMISSIONS WORLD-CLASS SIMULATION LAB

*By Sam Kpenu*



Students of ACE-PUTOR simulating the resuscitation of a patient in the Centre's Clinical Simulation Laboratory

The World Bank-supported Centre of Excellence in Public Health and Toxicological Research (ACE-PUTOR) in the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) has commissioned its simulation laboratory, a world-class facility fitted with sophisticated medical equipment for the training of medical and health workers to boost effective healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

ACE-PUTOR, a project jointly funded by the World Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD) under the Africa Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact) Project, aims to enhance the education of medical students by providing a link between classroom learning and real-life clinical situations.

Speaking at the commissioning ceremony, the Vice Chancellor, UNIPORT, Professor

Owunari Georgewill, described the new Medical Simulation Laboratory as a demonstration of ACE-PUTORS's commitment to the development of education in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa, as a whole. While commending the World Bank for the successes recorded on ACE Impact, the Vice-Chancellor tasked ACE-PUTOR to put the facility to good use by redoubling its efforts in producing excellent graduates who will compete favourably with their counterparts not only in Nigeria but globally. According to him, "In line with the changing trends in training medical and health workers to acquire the right knowledge and skills set for effective service delivery, the use of simulation has more than ever before become extremely relevant." Earlier in his address, the Centre Leader, Professor Daprim Ogaji, who expressed appreciation to the World Bank for the support to the Centre, said that the Centre of Excellence is a multi-

disciplinary project that aims to adopt best practices in research, training and support for innovation. He informed guests that the Centre has world-class, high-fidelity simulators across various specialty training in medicine and assured that the equipment would provide learners with real-world-like opportunities to develop, practise, and hone their knowledge and skills in a simulated environment. Provost of the university's College of Health Sciences, Professor Angela Frank-Briggs, expressed appreciation to the Vice-Chancellor for his astute leadership and for providing the necessary support to position ACE-PUTOR for excellence.

## *... Holds Simulation- based Medical Education Training*



One of ACE-PUTOR faculty (left) guiding one of the Centre's students through a practical session in one of the simulation laboratories

Following the commissioning of its world-class simulation laboratory, PUTOR held a one-day capacity-building workshop for faculty and other staff of the centre on the benefits and prospects of simulation-based medical education. The workshop guided participants through theoretical sessions and the practical demonstration of the simulators for basic and clinical medicine.

Consultant Renal Physician and Clinical Academic with the Salford Royal Hospital, Manchester, Professor Ibiwari Erekosim, posited that simulation-based medical education allows learners to acquire clinical skills without exposing

patients to unnecessary risk. He said, "The benefits include higher engagement and higher knowledge retention rates, productive failures with the opportunity to learn from mistakes, ease of access to training subjects and opportunities for repetitive activities that will lead to improved judgment and better problem-solving skills."

In his opening remarks, the Centre Leader, Professor Daprim Ogaji, stated that the equipment will enhance ACEPUTOR's capacity for excellence in healthcare delivery. According to him, PUTOR continues to work towards being the cynosure of all eyes in the sub-Saharan Africa region.

The occasion featured a demonstration of the use of the clinical simulator and the anomatage table, amongst other devices.



# CE-SPESS DEPLOYS SPECIAL TRAINING WORKSHOPS, PARTNERS MOUUAU, OTHERS

*By Fred Nwaozor*



Postgraduate students of FUTO CE-sPESS and the Centre's governance team, after an orientation workshop conducted in CE-sPESS

**D**etermined to expand its reach beyond Imo State and maximise its impact on society, the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Procurement, Environmental and Social Standards (CE-sPESS) of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) continues to empower people and organisations not only within Imo State but across other states in southeastern Nigeria. The

centre continues to train people in the fields of Procurement, Environmental Standards, and Social Standards. One such programme was a week-long executive short course which was conducted for staff of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU), in Abia State.

Explaining CE-sPESS's approach, the Centre Leader, Engr. Professor Gloria



Participants and Resource persons during a special training workshops in Umuahia, Abia State

Chukwudebe, said that the Centre’s objective is to improve procurement processes and create widespread awareness and acceptability of good environmental and social practices across the public and private sectors in the southeastern region. To this end, the Centre also organised executive short courses for staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka in Anambra State, University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo, Imo State, and in Owerri (the capital city of Imo State), in collaboration with the Owerri branch of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE).

Professor Chukwudebe attributed the Centre’s success to the support of the Vice-Chancellor of FUTO, Professor Nnenna

N. Oti, and expressed strong appreciation for her commitment to the achievement of project goals. The Centre Leader gave the assurance that the Centre’s executive short courses would be extended to other states within the region and that training would be held as frequently as necessary to achieve the goal of impacting the entire southeast.

Speaking during the training at MOUUAU, Professor Oti expressed appreciation to the host university for collaborating with CE-sPESS, FUTO, to make a difference in society. Professor Oti, who was represented by the Dean of the FUTO School of Postgraduate Studies, Professor Babs O. Esonu, assured participants of the university administration’s commitment



to the actualisation of the core mandate of the SPESSE Project.

Acknowledging the importance of capacity enhancement to any organisation, Vice-Chancellor of MOUAW, Professor Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe, expressed elation at the prospect of change and efficiency which the training would bring to his institution.

The Head of Service (HoS) of Abia State, Mrs Joy Maduka, noted that the training would afford participants the needed opportunity to acquire more knowledge and add value to lives, families, government, and the society at large. The HoS, who was represented at the workshop by the Director, Bureau of Establishments

and Pensions, Mrs Dim Ijeoma Clara, commended CE-sPESS for its dedication to empowering and equipping participants with requisite skills to address issues of Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards.

So far, over 3,000 public and private sector professionals have been successfully trained by CE-sPESS. The Centre continues to work with numerous national and international academic and non-academic partners to enhance the capacity of public servants and private sector professionals, in subjects such as procurement processes, law, and standards and exposure to environmental and social risks in project execution and implementation.

# TWELVE ACEITSE RESEARCH PROPOSALS ACCEPTED FOR NARST 2024

*By Temitope Ogunmokun*



Faculty of ACEITSE adopt the Culturo-Techno-Contextual-Approach in teaching both small and large class sizes

The Africa Centre of Excellence in Innovative and Transformative STEM Education (ACEITSE) continues to set its Culturo-Techno-Contextual Approach (CTCA) on a global stage with the acceptance of the Centre's 12 research proposals for presentation at the 97th annual National Association for Research in Science Teaching (NARST) conference which took place in March. This feat followed a rigorous peer review process by NARST, a global organisation for improving science education through research. The conference brings together top institutions, researchers and thought leaders in STEM research.

All 12 proposals of ACEITSE researched STEM teaching using the Centre's homegrown strategy - the Culturo-Techno-Contextual Approach (CTCA) - a training methodology publicised in 2015 after over 40 years of study and research. The methodology was originally designed for STEM but has been seen to have applicability in other fields of knowledge, making it a topic of interest in the teaching-learning (research) community.

Only two years ago, NARST accepted 12 proposals by ACEITSE following the same laborious review by NARST experts. The Centre's

performance was adjudged the best in Africa in terms of the number of papers accepted for presentation at the 95th International Conference, held in Vancouver, Canada. It is worthy of note that five of the accepted papers were written by undergraduates of LASU, under the guidance of PhD students of ACEITSE.

As part of efforts to fulfil its vision of promoting excellence in the teaching and learning of STEM, the Centre also completed the construction of a world-class laboratory. The facility is equipped with four laboratories including an ICT hub, two training halls, and a relaxation foyer, all designed to help students engage in hands-on learning experiences, develop practical skills, and enhance their problem-solving abilities in STEM and ICT education.

Visiting the facility whose construction spanned about 30 weeks, the Vice-Chancellor of Lagos State University (LASU), Professor Ibiyemi Olatunji-Bello, thanked the World Bank and assured the university community that "the STEM Education Laboratory will provide opportunities for hands-

on learning experiences, develop practical skills and enhance problem-solving abilities."

In keeping with a key mandate of the ACE Impact Project - institutional impact - ACEITSE facilitated a two-day training programme on Data Management and Information Security for the management and staff of LASU. The training had over 100 participants, comprising deans, directors, and heads of department drawn from the four campuses of the university across the Lagos metropolis.

Representing the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Administration, Professor Adenike Boyo, highlighted the importance of prioritising data security and the high level of security risks in cyberspace. According to her, "It is important that as management, we take the security of our data very seriously and perhaps for these reasons, the World Bank identifies data management as a sub-indicator of the University Management on the ACE Impact Project. This indicator, together with the other indicators of the ACE Impact Project, resonates very well with the



strategic goals of our administration for the university, particularly the goal of making LASU the best university in West Africa."

She also emphasised that the university administration is dedicated to the goals of the ACE-Impact Project and the university and promised that "the university management would continue to sustain and improve the excellent academic and administrative performance of the Centre and the entire University."

The training featured hands-on practicals, case studies and interactive sessions.

In collaboration with the university's Directorate of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (LASU-DSDE), ACEITSE also organised an intensive five-day workshop on solar installation and construction as well as web design and digital marketing for past and current students.

Another significant milestone achieved by ACEITSE is passing the gap assessment stage of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) accreditation process, which grants the Centre conditional clearance to proceed to the international institutional accreditation phase.

QAA is a United Kingdom-based non-profit organisation and one of the world's experts in quality assurance. It works with a wide range of partners to improve, review, and maintain quality and standards in higher education.



ACEITSE leadership with University management team



Solar energy installation and construction practical session



Web Design and Digital Marketing practical session

# UNLOCKING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: SPESSCE-ABU LEADS THE WAY

*By Amina Ahmad Aminu*



Programme Leader, Social Development, Dr Patience Mudiare (front row, 2nd from right) with participants of one of the Centre's short executive courses in Social Standards, which took place in ABU, Zaria

At the heart of academic brilliance at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria is a Centre of Excellence that stands as a testament to the institution's commitment to shaping future leaders and fostering sustainable development. The Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement Centre

of Excellence, Ahmadu Bello University (SPESSCE-ABU) is an unparalleled hub that sets the university apart in the realms of academia, research, and societal impact.

The success stories of the SPESSCE alumni speak volumes about the centre's efficacy and impact on society. These success stories tell of graduates who

have risen to influential positions in procurement, championed social causes, and spearheaded environmental initiatives. Their achievements underscore the role of the SPESSE Project in shaping leaders who not only excel in their respective fields but also contribute meaningfully to society.

Its impact on people and society in general within the short time the Centre was established explains the significant patronage which SPESSE-ABU gets from both the public and private sectors in Nigeria. The Centre's Short Executive Courses have successfully trained over 10,000 participants in Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards. Its Advanced Certificate courses also enrolled and trained 661 participants in Procurement Management, Environmental Studies and Social Development.

In the same vein, the SPESSE-ABU is on the verge of graduating the first set of students from its Postgraduate Diploma programmes in Procurement Management, Environmental Studies, and Social Development. It has enrolled 182 master's students in the current academic session and has concluded admission processes for the Centre's first set of students for the undergraduate component.

An alumnus of the Short Executive Course of the Centre, Aliyu Aminu, of the National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Katsina, expressed delight over the robust content of lectures delivered during the training, attesting that the training had made a meaningful impact on his career and profession.

SPESSE-ABU fosters an environment where students engage in community-driven projects, collaborate with non-governmental organisations, and immerse themselves in real-world problem-solving scenarios. With so much emphasis

on industrial training and field trips, graduates emerge not only as academically accomplished individuals but also as empathetic leaders ready to make a positive impact on society. The Centre adopts a collaborative approach among staff, students and relevant stakeholders which ensures that the Centre remains at the forefront of innovative solutions and contributes valuable insights to the global discourse on standards. Committed to sustainability, the Centre integrates environmental and social standards into procurement processes, fostering a culture of responsible resource management.

SPESSE-ABU is run by a team of seasoned professionals and academic experts, who ensure that graduates not only meet industry standards but also drive innovation within the procurement, environmental, and social landscape. This was observed by one of the Centre's resource persons, Dr Hashim Muhammad Suleiman, who stated that "the Centre has brought positive innovation to teaching that meets students' needs for a conducive learning environment." He added that the Centre has provided an opportunity for faculty to deliver lectures using the Learning Management System (LMS) in addition to the traditional face-to-face method, and in a serene environment that fosters teaching and learning.

SPESSE-ABU is not just a hub of academic excellence; it is a catalyst for positive change, and it stands as a model for other institutions looking to integrate sustainability into their operational framework.

In a world grappling with environmental challenges, SPESSE-ABU adopts a proactive approach to procurement practices, environmental stewardship, and social development. The Centre stands as a testament to ABU's commitment to producing visionary professionals who are not just educated but empowered to drive positive change on a global scale.



# ACEMFS INAUGURATES BUILDING

**...WINS EUROPEAN COMMISSION HORIZON GRANT**

*By Lydia Legbo*



A front view of the newly-commissioned ACEMFS building domiciled in the Federal University of Technology, Minna

The dream to transform the Federal University of Technology, Minna (FUTMinna) into an international citadel of learning for students and researchers is steadily becoming a reality with the inauguration of the newly constructed building for its Africa Centre of Excellence for Mycotoxin and Food Safety (ACEMFS) by the Acting Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), Chris J. Maiyaki. The centre is one of 17 Centres of Excellence established in Nigeria, under the Africa Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact) Project and aims to build human capacity in improving food safety in Africa.

Inaugurating the Centre building and other projects as part of activities to mark the celebration of the university's 41st Founder's Day and its 31st and 32nd combined convocation ceremonies, the Executive Secretary, who was represented by NUC Visiting Professor Chinedum Nwajiuba, noted that FUTMinna has a reputation of "representing in many ways the ideals and culture of a university as a universal entity. This adds to the good work already in existence and I want to say it is highly commendable. I expect to see this university build on what it is doing to become globally acknowledged, as it works towards being ranked among the top 100, globally."

The two-storey building is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities like digital lecture rooms and offices to develop human capacity and train high-learning manpower in the areas of food security. The Centre is also expected to track health-related challenges on the African continent.

ACEMFS is a World Bank-supported project which aims among other things to create more visibility for FUTMinna by increasing publications in high-impact journals and promoting the internationalisation of education with regional student enrolment and international faculty recruitment.

As part of its achievements, the Centre, in collaboration with 11 other international institutions, won a €5m European Commission Grant to execute a project titled EU-AU Partnership for Resilient, Inclusive and Safe Food Systems for Everyone (UP-RISE). The UP-RISE project aims to integrate food safety practices associated with mycotoxin contamination into all aspects of food production, distribution, marketing and consumption in Africa. It provides tangible tools and strategies to enhance inclusive participation in improving and strengthening the African Food Safety System (AFSS) at the local, national and regional levels.

The project's activities align with the current African Union Food Safety Strategy for Africa, focusing on three regions of the AU, and with fieldwork in five target member states (Benin, Côte



Prof. Nwajiuba and other invited guests inspecting one of the classrooms in the newly-commissioned ACEMFS building

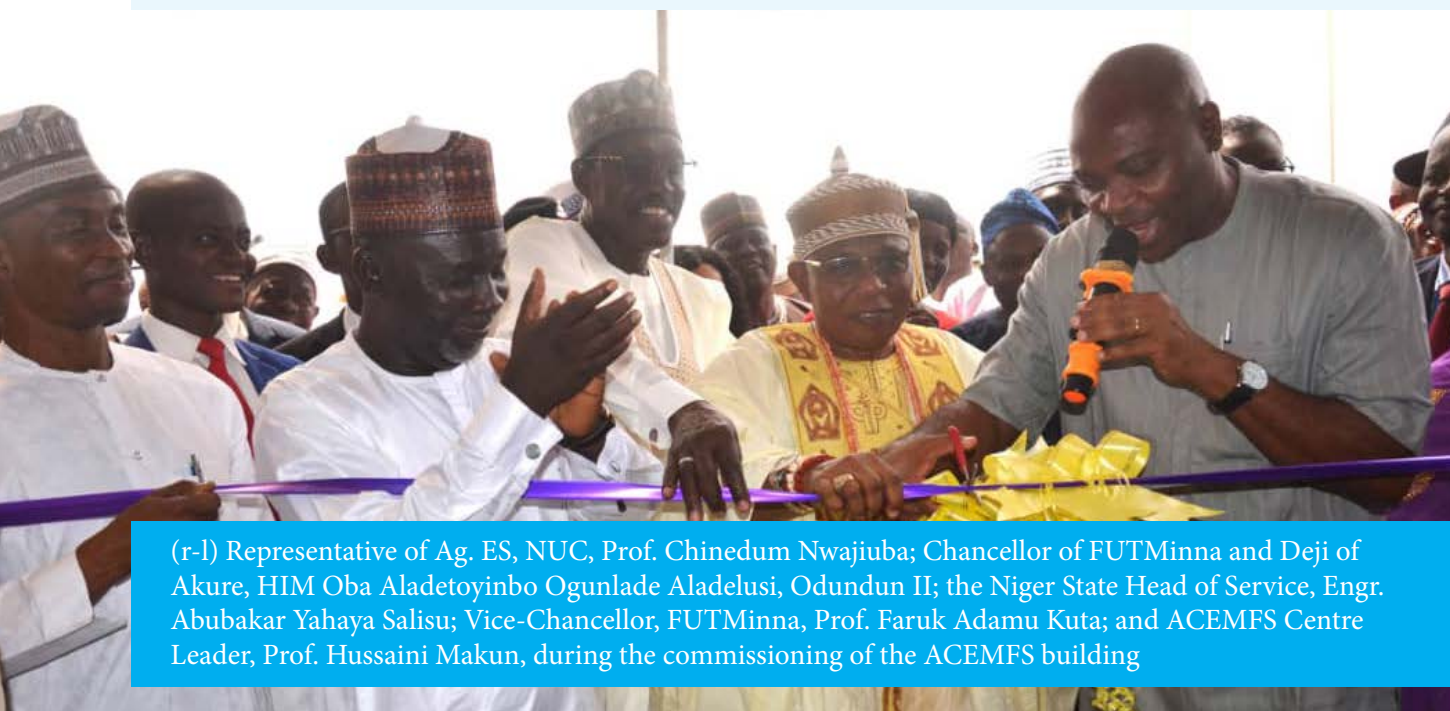
d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa). During the project's lifespan, two joint PhDs will be offered between FUTMinna and the University of Ghent, Belgium, focusing on improving quality culture in the kunun zaki value chain in Nigeria (with an emphasis on mycotoxin reduction), and between FUTMinna and Wageningen University, in the Netherlands, focusing on developing a predictive mathematical model and an early warning system with mobile application to mitigate mycotoxin contamination, pre-and post-harvest in the five selected African countries.

The grant proposal writing team, which was led by Professor Sarah De Saeger of the University of Ghent, has the following institutions in the consortium: Consiglio Nazionale Delle Ricerche, Italy; Centre de Cooperation Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), France; Wageningen University, The Netherlands; Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria; Université Abomey-Calavi, Benin; University

of Nangui Abrogoua, Côte d'Ivoire; University of Nairobi, Kenya; University of Johannesburg, South Africa; African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development, South Africa; ADS Insight, Belgium; and Women in Africa SAS, France.

ACEMFS researchers representing FUTMinna in the consortium include the centre leader Professor Hussaini Anthony Makun, and Dr Hadiza Lami Mohammad, both of the Biochemistry Department, Dr Helen Shnnada Auta of the Microbiology Department and Dr Eustace Manayi Dogo, Head of the Department of Computer Engineering.

The grant award ceremony conducted by the European Commission was held at the kick-off meeting of the UP-RISE project at Ghent University, Belgium, and was preceded by the remote signing of the consortium agreement by the Vice-Chancellor of FUTMinna, Professor Faruk Adamu Kuta.



(r-l) Representative of Ag. ES, NUC, Prof. Chinedum Nwajiuba; Chancellor of FUTMinna and Deji of Akure, HIM Oba Aladetoyinbo Ogunlade Aladelusi, Odundun II; the Niger State Head of Service, Engr. Abubakar Yahaya Salisu; Vice-Chancellor, FUTMinna, Prof. Faruk Adamu Kuta; and ACEMFS Centre Leader, Prof. Hussaini Makun, during the commissioning of the ACEMFS building

# NIGERIA SEEKS MORE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE, EXTENSION OF FUNDING DEADLINE



Ag Executive Secretary, NUC, Chris J. Maiyaki, with representatives of the World Bank, SPESSE Centres of Excellence and Implementing Agencies, during a courtesy call on the Ag ES as part of the project MTR

The Federal Government of Nigeria has made a case for the establishment of more Centres of Excellence in the nation's tertiary institutions under the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental, and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE) Project. This is following the tremendous successes the existing Centres have achieved on their various mandates and the need to deepen the culture of excellence in academics and research.

Making this known during the recently concluded Mid-Term-Review (MTR) of the World Bank for the SPESSE Project which was held in Abuja, Acting Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), Chris J. Maiyaki, said this has become necessary considering the huge demand for the project. He also made a case for an extension of the date for project closure/the expiration of funding from the World Bank and for additional financing to be considered to scale up the project.

Enumerating some of the successes recorded so far on the project, Maiyaki said the mid-term review is an opportunity “to take stock of our achievements, assess our challenges, and recalibrate our strategies. It is therefore not just about acknowledging what we have done well but also about identifying areas that require our attention and improvement, cognisant that we stand at a pivotal point, halfway through our project timeline.”

Despite initial implementation challenges, the Acting Executive Secretary listed some of the achievements recorded by the SPESSE Project. They include resource verification for postgraduate and undergraduate courses and listing of

Procurement, Environmental Standards, and Social Standards (PES) on the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) portal. He noted that all the tracks are active with the enrolment of students into PES tracks C, D, and E (post graduate diploma, masters and bachelors programmes). The project's achievements include the commencement of lectures, successful conduct of the second round of the verification exercise by the Independent Third-Party Verifiers (ITPV) and the subsequent release of funds based on the achieved Disbursement-Linked Results (DLRs) and Disbursement-Linked Indicators (DLIs) to all Centres and NUC, as well as the publication and distribution of the Excellence magazine and updating the online version of the magazine (<https://excellencenewsletter.ng/>).

Other accomplishments are the successful launch of the monitoring and evaluation portal for the measurement of project results, the deployment and utilisation of High-Performance Computing (HPC), Learning Management Systems (LMS) as well as LMS devices in all six Centres of Excellence, and successful training of relevant staff of the Centres on content creation and the use of the LMS and the LMS devices.

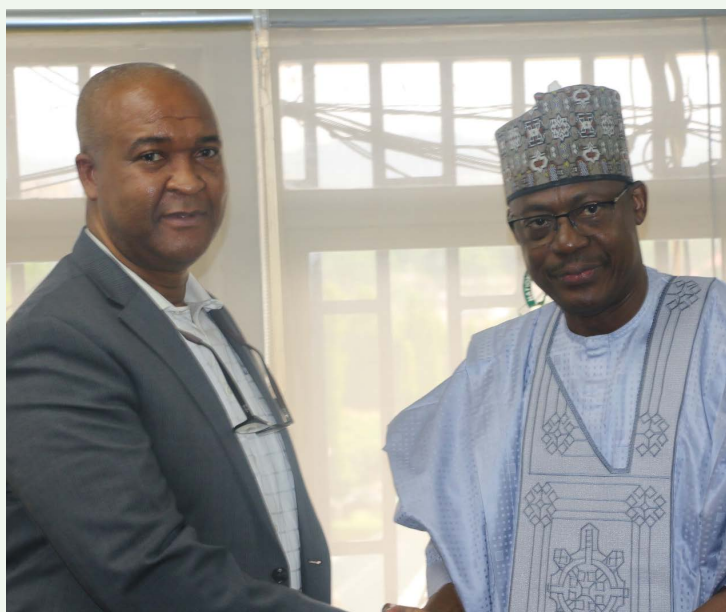
“The progress we have made so far is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and collaboration of each team member”, the Acting Executive Secretary emphasised, noting that the successes recorded will provide the impetus for conversations around project extension. “Despite our many wins, we have encountered several obstacles, but we have tackled them, and continue to address new ones, with resilience and determination. One of these obstacles is the delay in the deployment

of the certification portals for the three implementing agencies (IAs), the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (FMWA), and the Federal Ministry of Environment (FMEnv). The Executive Secretary however expressed delight that the procurement processes for the portal had reached an advanced stage, thanks to the collective efforts of all stakeholders. Upon completion of the portal, graduates from the programmes of the SPESSEs can be properly certified in line with project objectives.

Appreciating the NUC's leadership in Project implementation, the immediate past World Bank Task Team Lead (TTL) on SPESSE, Mr Ikechukwu Nweje, noted that the SPESSE Project has come a long way since the last review meeting, which focused more on challenges and setbacks which, commendably, were now resolved. The TTL attributed the progress made to the collective effort of the Bank, Implementing Agencies, and the Centres of Excellence, adding that the Bank is now focused on results.

Mr Nweje however expressed concern over the delays being experienced with the process of developing and launching the certification portal. "It is the biggest item, and it is what will unleash the full potential of this project for the benefit of the country. It is the icing on the cake and will help to reposition this project. Therefore, we need everybody's cooperation to ensure that the contract for the portal is awarded as soon as possible.

The former TTL expressed hope that the Federal Ministry of Finance, the primary borrower on behalf of the Federal Government of Nigeria, would submit a formal request for Project extension to

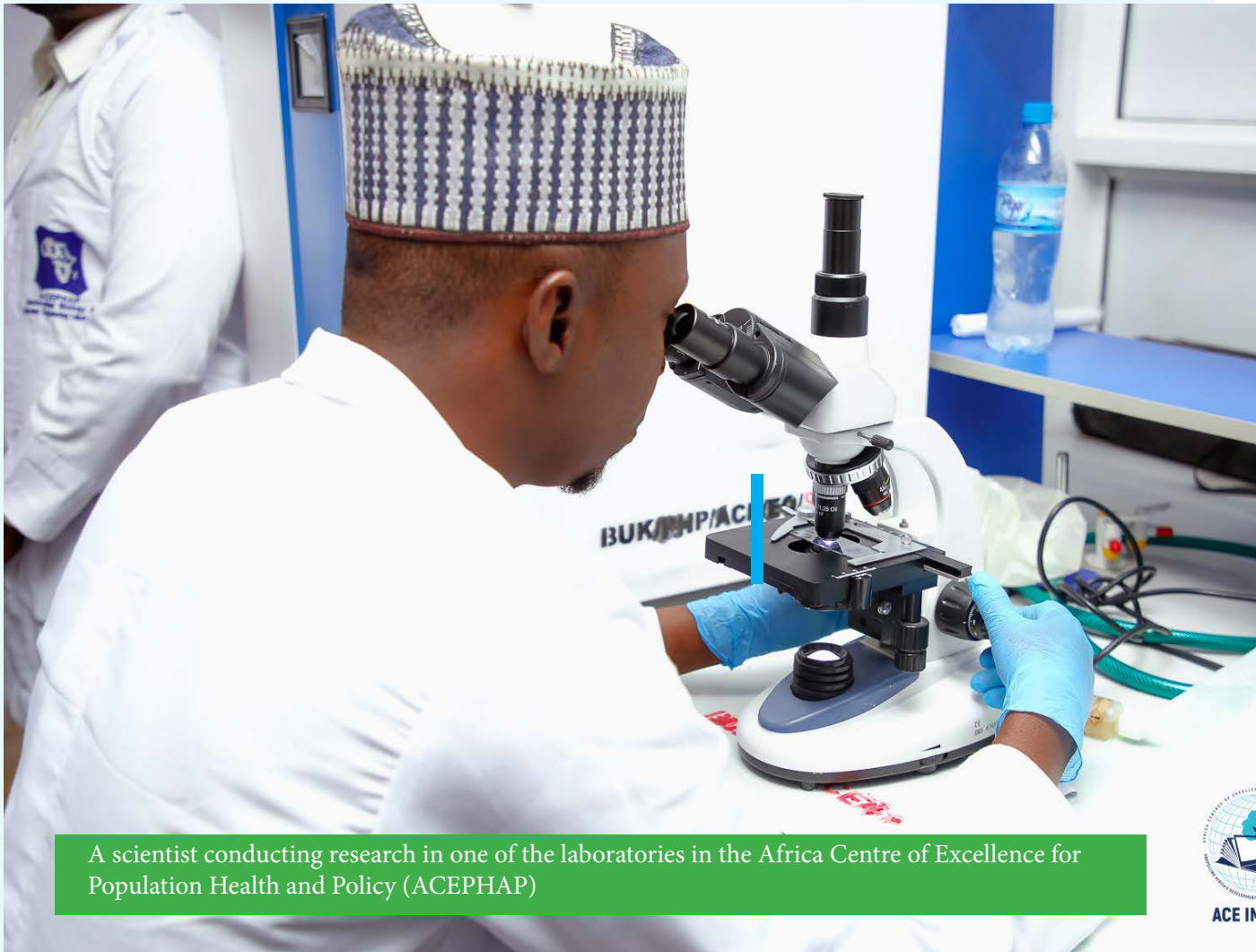


Ag Executive Secretary, NUC, Chris J. Maiyaki (right) with the former TTL, SPESSE, Mr Ikechukwu Nweje

ensure that project objectives are achieved. Mr Nweje stated that the SPESSE Project is on the right trajectory because of the composition of the Project teams. He reiterated the Bank's commitment to supporting the SPESSE Project.

The SPESSE Project was conceived by the World Bank, and it is being implemented by the NUC and other critical stakeholders to develop sustainable capacity in managing procurement, environmental, and social standards in the public and private sectors. The Project aims to bridge the gap between the insufficient supply of high-quality professionals in the procurement, environmental and social fields and the lack of academic programmes and curricula in these sectors in the Nigerian education system.

To achieve the objectives of the project, six Centres of Excellence were established to train students in the aforementioned fields. Implementing Agencies and other stakeholders were also co-opted.



A scientist conducting research in one of the laboratories in the Africa Centre of Excellence for Population Health and Policy (ACEPHAP)

# ACEPHAP ASSUMES MENTORSHIP ROLE OVER TETFUND CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

*By Bala G. Abdullahi*

The Africa Centre of Excellence for Population Health and Policy (ACEPHAP) is fast becoming a household name not only in Nigeria but across the African continent. Ever since the Centre's breakthrough with its E-Motive Research Project, an innovative solution to postpartum haemorrhage, a major cause of maternal mortality, globally, the Centre, which is domiciled in Bayero University, Kano, has gained more visibility, both regionally and internationally.

With the successes recorded by the World Bank/FGN-supported ACE Impact Project, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) approved the establishment of 22 TETFund Centres of Excellence in selected tertiary institutions, each with an allocation of one billion Naira to commence implementation. Of the 22 centres, 12 are domiciled in Nigerian universities, six in Colleges of Education, and the remaining six in polytechnics across the nation's six geopolitical zones.

Inspired by ACEPHAP's success, and motivated by the urge to excel, one of the TETFund centres, the Centre of Excellence for Integrated Farming Systems, domiciled in Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, sought to collaborate with ACEPHAP to tap from its wealth of experience. As part of their collaboration, both Centres jointly organised a five-day workshop for staff of all the TETFund Centres of Excellence in the country. The objectives of the workshop which took place at the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, were to mentor the newly-established TETFund Centres of Excellence and for them to learn and replicate ACEPHAP's model for success.

In his opening remarks, the Rector of the

Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Alhaji Sani Usman, commended, ACEPHAP for its willingness to share its experience with its newer counterparts. The Rector, who was represented by the Director, Academic Planning of the Polytechnic, Alhaji Salisu Muhammad Shehu, noted that over 20 TETFund Centres of Excellence had assembled to participate in the experience-sharing workshop, and commended ACEPHAP for its willingness to share its knowledge with others. He urged all the participants to make the best use of the opportunity by replicating the ACEPHAP success story in their work plans to excel and attract more funding from other donor agencies.

Director of the Bauchi Centre, Dr Kolawole Richard, said that ACEPHAP's guidance had strengthened his centre's faith that it would succeed, and expressed optimism that the collaboration between ACEPHAP and his Centre would be sustained. On its part, his team would do everything possible to ensure the sustainability of the relationship. Dr Richard urged the participants to make the best use of the training to ensure that the desired objectives were achieved.

Delivering the lead paper titled, 'Concept of a Centre of Excellence' the Centre Leader, ACEPHAP, Professor Hadiza Galadanci, said that both ACEPHAP and the TETFund Centre of Excellence were conceived with clear objectives outlined by their various donor agencies. She stated that the success or otherwise of a centre depended largely on the approach of its management team and its compliance with the guidelines laid down by the donor agencies.



Another critical factor for the success of any Centre of Excellence, Professor Galadanci said, is a definite understanding of the centre's objectives and its *raison d'être*. She emphasised the need for Centre Leaders to ensure that all project team members were on the same page regarding the vision, mission, and objectives of the centre, and, by extension, the project. This would enable the centre management to work as a team towards achieving project objectives.

Unveiling ACEPHAP's model for success, Professor Galadanci noted that the Centre is intentional about regional networking, regional postgraduate training, cutting-edge research, collaboration and linkages, institutional impact, publication in high-impact journals, innovation and entrepreneurship and gender sensitivity. Any centre that is desirous of success must take cognisance of this model, she said.

Considering that it was a mentorship workshop, most of the presentations made were experiences shared by the staff of ACEPHAP.



One of ACEPHAP faculty conducting research in one of the Centre's laboratories



# ACETEL: TRULY DRIVING ENHANCED LEARNING WITH TECHNOLOGY

*By Loretta Edozie*



Centre Director, ACETEL, Prof. Grace Jokthan (left), discussing capacity-building possibilities with representatives of Elsevier

*The Africa Centre of Excellence for Technology-assisted Learning's (ACETEL) concerted efforts to enhance the use of technology through the development of human capacity and research in digital solutions at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) continue to yield tremendous results. The Centre's impact is expanding. Scholars and institutions alike applaud ACETEL for its successes, and the Centre's enrolment figures continue to swell.*

*How does ACETEL deliver efficiently on its mandate to connect the IT skills-hungry youth population of Nigeria and other in-need Africans across the world in 2024? How does the Centre work its magic?*

**Mr. Ismaila Idris Sinan** is a PhD scholar from Nigeria. Describing his experience as a beneficiary of the ACETEL scholarship, he says, “Courtesy of the programme, I was sponsored to Cotonou and Senegal for various workshops. I went on to do an internship at the Inria Research Institute at CentraleSupélec Rennes, France. During this period, I gained a lot of experience and can tell you that there is none comparable to ACETEL.”

**Mrs. Adam Drammeh**, a 2021 Masters fellow in Management Information Systems (MIS), from the Gambia, said ACETEL provides her access to beneficial resources, such as the latest technology and databases, to help him conduct in-depth studies and stay at the forefront of technological advancements in MIS.

**Mrs Grace Egenti**, a 2021 PhD Cyber Security scholar also from Nigeria, described her ACETEL lecturers as “amazing.” In her words, “We usually have Zoom meetings with our facilitators, so it's been good; it's been wonderful.” She adds: “I was in Senegal and I also visited Canada and presented a paper all under the auspices of ACETEL, and people I have recommended to the Centre all tell me they have no regrets.”

Speaking on the activities of ACETEL from inception to date, Centre Director, Professor Grace Jokthan, disclosed that so far, the Centre has enrolled a total of 267 students from countries across West and Central Africa such as Ghana, Gambia, Uganda, and Cameroon. Thanks to student mobility, the Centre has students in the USA, South Korea, Canada, etc.

As part of ACETEL's institutional impact, the Centre facilitated the development

of the Examination Result Presentation Platform (ERPP) currently in use by NOUN's Directorate of Examination and Assessment (DEA) for the presentation of all the university's results. The platform is a major improvement over what was previously in use by the university. The Centre facilitated NOUN's development of strategic documents, whose policies and strategies have supported the university's alignment with best practices. ACETEL also continues to impact the university community with innovations like the iNOUN Chatbot for Educational Enquiries, the eGenti Kids Monitoring System, CBTng.Com, NeighbourHealth Specialist, My Language PAL, and Enhanced Technical Education for People with Visual Impairment using Artificial Intelligence. Two products of the Centre, Sendit and NeighbourHealth Specialist, an online hospital service platform that brings patients and physicians together for real-time consultation, have won the Digital Science and Technology (DSTN) Incubation Support. The Centre intends to support the patenting and commercialisation of these products and software in partnership with the university's Directorate of Research Administration (DRA). The Centre of Excellence facilitated the participation of NOUN in 52 academic events, which built capacity for 145 staff and students in the system. This enabled knowledge sharing and collaborations while attracting global visibility for ACETEL.

Through the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN), a National Research and Education Network (NREN) which services are provided and supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), ACETEL provides MATLAB (an analytical software) and a DrillBit plagiarism checker for all staff and students



Vice-Chancellor, NOUN, Prof. Olufemi Peters, inspecting one of ACETEL's laboratories

of NOUN. The unlimited access to these databases and resources has improved the university's research ecosystem and added value to the quality of research for both staff and students. Presently, two PhD research projects of the Centre funded by the Digital Science and Technology Network (DSTN) have been concluded while a third, titled Enhanced Technical Education for People with Visual Impairment Using Artificial Intelligence, is ongoing.

To ensure the quality of programmes offered by the Centre, the NUC conducted resource verification and accreditation visits to the academic programmes offered in ACETEL. Today, all six programmes are fully accredited. To ensure that the culture of excellence pervades the entire university, ACETEL supported NOUN through a successful Gap Analysis process, a critical step in securing international institutional accreditation for the university. This assessment was conducted by the UK-based

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Efforts are presently ongoing to ensure that the final step in the accreditation process is concluded this year.

So that graduates of the Centre are equipped with the requisite skills for a dynamic workplace, students of ACETEL undergo internships, and, so far, over 150 students of the Centre have concluded internships at various national and international private sector organisations. The Centre continues to explore viable partnerships with renowned organisations such as Elsevier, to provide access to top-notch online resources such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, to faculty and students.

In partnership with Coursera, ACETEL also provides practical-based courses that ensure that the students obtain highly recognised professional certificates for the job market, thereby improving their employability and efficiency on the job.



# Africa Centres of Excellence



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