

NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR AN EMERGING ECONOMY



KEYNOTE SPEECH DELIVERED BY
SENATOR BEN NDI OBI (OJELUIGBO)
DURING THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE OF
EMEAGWALI CENTRE
FOR RESEARCH, RENEWABLE ENERGY AND MATERIAL
SCIENCE (ERREMS)



**Keynote speaker Senator Ben Obi arriving at the Emeagwali Research Center, Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria
March 11th – 13th, 2009.**

Conference Photos posted at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/emeagwali/EmeagwaliCenter#>

PROTOCOLS;

It is my distinct pleasure and privilege to have been invited to deliver a keynote speech during this very important conference. I thank the organizers from the bottom of my heart for this honour and also for their success in gathering to this conference world renowned scientists and technologists among whom is our own dear Philip Emeagwali, the wonder man of computer science and technology in the 20th and 21st century, ebullient scientist and

researcher Dr. Barth Nnaji, eminent professors – A. Animalu, A.I Menkiti, H.C Inyama and Sam Enibe as lead presenters.

Distinguished audience, my task in my humble opinion is to give a panoramic view of the conference theme and sub themes and thereafter highlight what I think the conference at the end is expected to contribute to the growth and development of our emerging economy.



The theme of this inaugural conference as your centre rightly thought out is – **NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR AN EMERGING ECONOMY**, and divided into five sub-themes as follows:

- Nano – Technology in Medicine

- Nano – Technology in Engineering
- Nano – Technology in Science
- Nano – Technology in Information and Communication Technology
- Solar Energy / Renewable Energy Sources.

It is my sincere view that the choice of the conference theme and sub-theme is not only very apt but also appropriate at this period in our development history when most National Development plans and most Government policies which are backed with very huge budgetary outlay/allocation have yielded very poor and disappointing results in terms of service delivery.



I therefore, hope that by the end of this conference this centre would be able to make a name for itself in Africa and world at large

by taking a bold step in deconstructing the existing scientific and technology orthodoxies –models, patterns and theories etc, which have stagnated development in emerging economies like Nigeria, and thereafter make new beginning through a scientific and technological paradigm shift like the Indians, Chinese, Malaysians did and had rapid socio-economic and high level technological development in their emerging economies. This conference would have succeeded in actualizing its objective if it comes up with new technologies that will result in improved generation of Electricity supply in Nigeria so as to make our industrial base effective and sustainable as well as ensure that other service delivery sectors function optimally. For instance, there is no doubt any more that hydro and thermal sources of power generation in Nigeria have failed the nation and therefore, I expect the conference to call for an alternative source like solar which had worked wonderfully in other countries. This call is urgent and the time for it is now.



As a member of power and steel committee of the senate until 2007, I have authentic record of figures spent by the Federal Government on power sector from 1999-2007. However, the probe panel of the House of Representatives on power sector which investigated this period under reference observed in their report in the Nation Newspaper of Wednesday, March 4, 2009 on its first page that Federal Government blew US \$13 billion on power sector contracts. To quote the report correctly –“From the oral and documentary evidence, it was clearly established that the total expenditure in the power sector during the period 1999-2007 was US \$ 13,278,937,409,94 billion.” The report further observed that “It is curious and quite strange that officials rush to pay contractors in full even before engineering design for the project have been

completed and approved.” The result of all this huge expenditure was and still is epileptic power in Nigeria emerging economy.



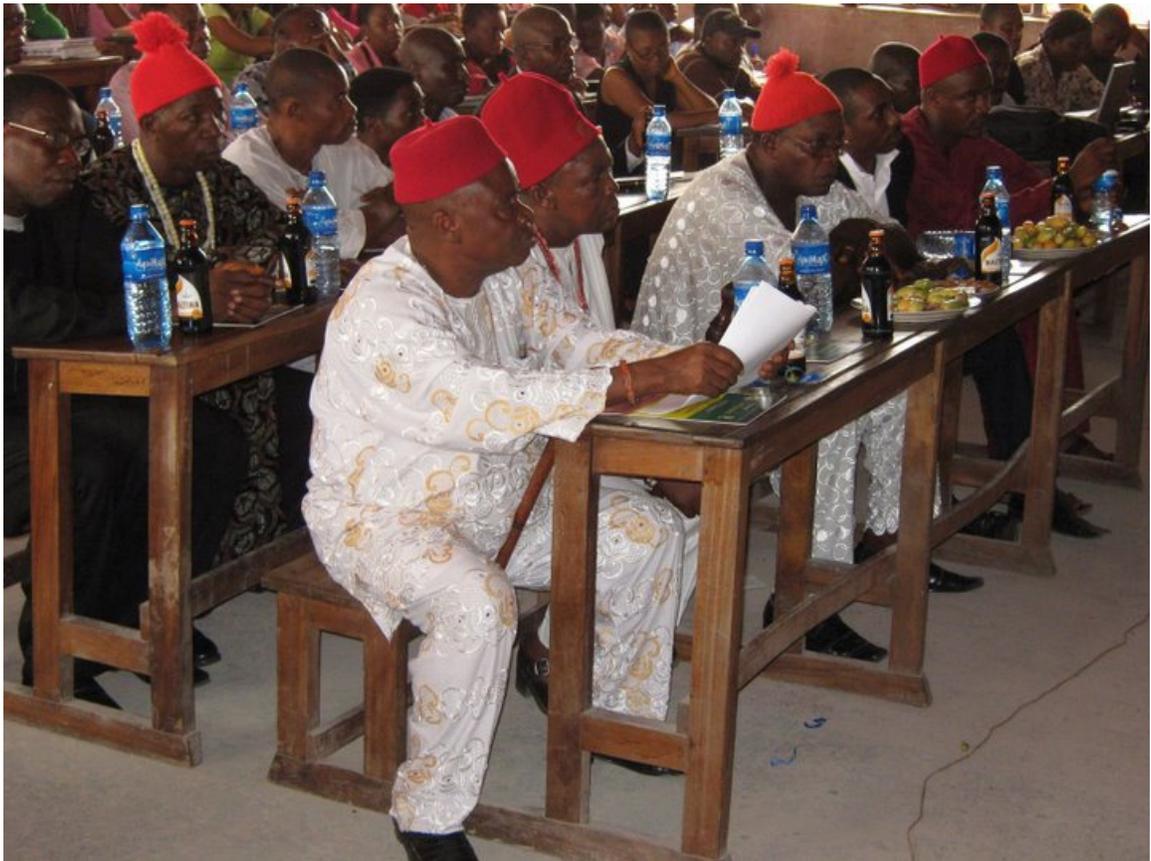
More recently the president Musa Yar'Adua in the first two years of his administration had approved US \$ 2.5 billion (N375 billion) to improve gas supply and completion of some power stations project. The target is to realize the presidential mandate to attain generation of 6000-mega watt by end of 2009. Simple calculation suggests that Government from 1999-2009 had spent US \$ 15.5 just to generate 6000 mega watt of electricity while record show that Lagos State alone require above 5,000 mega watt. I make a bold to state from my experience in India and Israel when I visited both countries officially, that if Government had spent half the money already spent on power sector on solar energy source in

Nigeria, the ugly experience of low current, half current or load shading in Nigeria would have been history by now. This conference I expect will push this powerfully because in steady power supply lies every other service delivery sectors in our emerging economy be it in health, agriculture for food self-sufficiency, manufacturing for industrial optimal functionality etc. I signed out power sector to justify the need for a call to alternate source of electricity generation in Nigeria through solar.



Brothers and sisters in the orbit of academics and technology, I may not be one of you. I class myself as a practical and well-informed patriot, who is concerned with the welfare and development problems of our country. [As the name shows, the Emeagwali centre was conceived by inspiration. It is well situated](#)

to achieve specified goals. But as our people say; Ego Bu Mma Nko! Yes! It is money that sharpens the blade of ideas. It is therefore inevitable that this centre must be well supported and equipped to succeed. The burden of establishing a thriving and robust research centre should not rest on the shoulders of government (s) only. It is a shared effort if we must make rapid progress. The monied class has to be involved as patrons, or investors.



We in the south-east have remained for a long, long time as a trading people. Successive governments have not bent us. Britain was once a nation of shop keepers. Change came with the industrial revolution. The compelling reality is that the time is now, for us to join the army of the revolution in science and new technologies. We can not exist in comfort in today's world, in isolation. Unless we

join the revolution full scale, we will not go places. I do not hesitate to use this forum to appeal to our moneybags to support this centre to the hilt. I can believe that the time will come when wealth, especially easy money, will be taxed for frivolous living and consumption. We must change. We have to invest for survival in comfort, in new technologies that rule the world.



As I wind up, I want to say emphatically, that in energy matters there is no alternative to solar energy. All other sources have failed us. The only positive choice we have is to embrace solar energy fully. The task is urgent. Solar is an inexhaustible resource. Sunlight is free and cheap. Three countries on the continent are going solar. The Morocco, Algeria and Libya, I gather that they rely on solar energy for 1/4th of their power needs. They are in the race

to switch fully to solar energy. Like US these countries are washed by harsh, hot, winds and live on the edge of deserts.



Medical Science and Agriculture: I have not heard that a foreign patient was flown to Nigerian hospital for treatment on any ailment. Nigerians flock to India and China through Thailand, for kidney transplant operations, not to talk of Europe and America. Even teaching hospitals designated, as specialist centers are not known to host foreign patients. Why? Could it be for deficiencies? [I hope that with time the relevant unit of Emeagwali centre will develop to rank as a reference centre like the famous Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia.](#) This is where the blood sample of Dr. Manfred, a German doctor working in Onitsha, was taken to for diagnosis, forty years ago. He was a victim of Lassa fever, a disease

whose birthplace is Lasa, in Kwara state. No cure has been found for Lasa fever as with Nile disease that was discovered in Egypt which has now spread to the southern part of US. Providence may be waiting for the ULI centre to kick-start before opening the door for a cure for both diseases that are original natives of Africa.

I mentioned Malaysia earlier. It is a country with the largest oil palm plantation in the world, and it is a big exporter of vegetable oil. The irony is that palm seedlings were imported from Nigeria by that country. The Ivory Coast is the highest ranking producer of palm products in West Africa. We even import part of palm oil needs from there. We are crying for the revival of our dead palm industry. Sixty years ago we were the largest exporter of palm oil. My personal hope is that it is laboratories in ULI that will grow hybrid palm seedlings that will return the East to the frontline of exporters of palm products. I am a politician. I do not see things from only one angle. The benefit of any research you conduct here has to be targeted on the people and their welfare, more than on the elite who can look after themselves.

Finally, I urge you to devote time on research that impact on our emerging economy. I expect the centre will from time to time organize science fairs as forum for

- The exchange of indigenous technological discoveries and products.
- The exchange of practical skills and knowledge among scientists and techologists.

I wish you fruitful exchange of ideas on the last day of the conference and hope that the conference communiqué will bring new paradigm in our scientific and technological research and application of their results for improvement, growth and development of our country and its citizens.

Thanks and God bless you all.





