

# History of AAU

## INTRDUCTION

The origin of older universities in the developed world can be traced in Europe to as far back as twelfth century. Most of them developed from cathedral and monastery schools and other centres of learning under the guidance of academic leaders whose fame spread far beyond their immediate environment, enabling them to attract scholars and students from far and near. Their rates of development varied and it is sometime difficult to know when they actually became full fledged universities. The University of Bologna is believed to be the oldest having been founded in the early twelfth century even though it existed as a law school since the ninth century. The University of Paris with a slight different structure from that of Bologna developed in the late twelfth century. These schools and centres, which where founded mainly to serve the professions, provided unified teaching of law, medicine and theology providing Ministers of Religion and other statesmen and professionals. Some of these schools originated as break-away groups caused often by disagreements with the mode of instruction or content of curriculum in the host school.

With time, the control of the schools passed on to permanent bodies of administrators and the course of study were also broadened. University traditions are now well set out so that new Universities do not have to undergo all the stages of transformation provided the aims and objectives are clearly defined by the proprietors and operators. New Universities were established from time to time, because of the expansion of the older Universities may not be able to meet the varied needs and demands of potentials students but also for moral, political and a variety of reasons. They immediately began to function like the old ones as soon as structures are in place. Ambrose Alli University is one such new generation. Unlike the older Universities earlier mentioned, the story of Ambrose Alli University has similarities with many of the relatively younger Universities of the developing world whose establishment depended to a large extent on the vision and conviction of some political leaders who used persuasive and coercive strategies to overcome strong opposition to the implementation of what would normally be regarded as a people oriented development. As he often stated at different occasions in the planning stages and the on set of the University, Prof. Alli was very optimistic that posterity would justify his many decisions in the establishment of the University. There cannot be a better vindication of his optimism than the fact that the University which he established as Bendel State University, Ekpoma in 1981 (which after the creation of Edo State in 1992 had its name changed to Edo State University) has gone through an Act passed by the State House of Assembly and signed into law by the Executive Governor of Edo State, Chief Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion in 1999 been renamed (Professor) Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, after the founder.

The idea of the University was firmly predicated on the dynamics of the rapid educational development through which the whole of Bendel State was undergoing in the late seventies and early eighties. Energized by the education policies which Prof. Ambrose Allli, the first Executive Governor of Bendel State was implementing at the time, education was rapidly becoming an industry in its own right in the State. There was a

yawning gap in the available opportunities for teeming youths, to fulfil their educational aspirations at tertiary level. The number of potentially qualified University materials in our State far exceeded those in other States of the federation and the introduction of the quota system made matters worse. Even the University of Benin which started off as a State University (Midwest Institute of Technology) had been taken over by the Federal Government and made out of reach of most Bendelites.

A new State University appeared to be the only solution even though the idea of creating new Universities in the country was already generating controversy in several quarters. Two seemingly justifiable diametrically opposed viewpoints were seriously canvassed. One school of thought which castigates any additional University as 'proliferation' argued that the older Universities, be expanded to provide for increased enrolment to give time for proper planning of the establishment of new Universities. Against the quality control school is the counter view that many Universities were a necessity at the prevailing level of socio-economic and political development in our country. Universities serve as pragmatic instruments for provision of much needed manpower for rapid national development.

The issue of a second University in the State was even more compelling. The annual turnover of University material from secondary schools and other institutions was phenomenal. Yet, the Federal Government in a bid to achieve even educational development designated some States as 'educationally disadvantaged' and introduced measures which worked against the interests of students of Bendel State origin seeking admission to higher institutions or seeking scholarships or other financial assistance for their educational pursuits. In real terms, therefore, qualified first rate students of Bendel origin were being systematically rejected to make room for less qualified students of other States. The situation was bound to become more gloomy for Bendel indigenes when students benefiting from the widely liberalized policies at primary and secondary school level joined the admission market.

These factors led Governor Alli to constitute a 'committee on the establishment of a Bendel State University and other Institutions' on January 15th, 1981. the terms of reference were:

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to explore the possibility of establishing different categories of institutions of higher learning in the State such as additional Polytechnics and Colleges of Industrial Technology,

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the Faculties or Colleges of Education to be established in the proposed Bendel State University,

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the structure of the University,

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the curriculum of the various faculties or colleges, and

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to  
examine such other relevant matters location, etc. and make appropriate  
recommendation. (This last item was however deleted from the Committee's  
terms of reference on February 20th, 1981.

The  
committee had, as Chairman, Prof M. I. Ogbeide, Professor of Paediatrics  
and Director of Institute of Child Health, University of Benin. The  
other members were mostly academics of Bendel State origin including  
Prof. A. N. A. Imevbore, Professor of Biological Sciences, University of  
Ife (he could not serve due to ill health), Prof. S. A. Aluko,  
Professor of Economics and Economic Adviser to Ondo State Government,  
Prof. Obaro Ikime, Professor of History and Dean of Arts at the  
University of Ibadan, Prof. Itse Sagay, Visiting Professor of Law at the  
University of Benin, Dr. Bayo Akerele, Economic Adviser to Bendel State  
Government, Dr. Robson Momoh, Commissioner for Education, Bendel State,  
Dr. Union Edebiri, Senior Lecturer in French, University of Lagos, Mr S.  
A. Kalulu, Senior Deputy Registrar, University of Ibadan, Dr. T. O. K.  
Audu, Associate Professor, Department of Chemical and Petroleum  
Engineering, University of Benin, Engr. P. A. Otaigbe, Project Engineer,  
Governor's Office, Benin and Mr. Dickson Amagada, Director of  
Information, Governor's Office, Benin, Dr. G. O. Oboh, Senior Research  
Officer, New Nigeria Bank, Benin was Secretary.

The  
committee in its report recommended the establishment of the Bendel  
State University and two institutions of Industrial Technology. The  
primary object of the University and other tertiary educational  
institutions is to provide educational opportunities, first and fore  
most, for the purpose of individual self development as follow-up of the  
initial program of universal education enabling everyone to exploit and  
understand the changing environment in which he or she has to live as a  
worthy consumer as well as participant in the matter of community and  
national development.

The Committee in its report also recommended the appointment of Governing Council, a Vice Chancellor and other Principal officers of the University. It also stressed the need for provision of infrastructural facilities.

The Committee recommended a collegiate structure in preference to faculty structure. Each College was to be headed by a Rector with its full complement of administrative staff including Dean of Schools and Heads of Departments. There were to be eight Colleges in the take-off stage:

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College of Arts and Social Science

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College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

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College of Education

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College of Engineering and Technology

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College of Environmental Design

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College of Legal Studies

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College of Medical Science

## College of Natural Science

The acceptance of the report by Governor Ambrose Alli as followed by the preparation of a Bill to make provision for the establishment of the Bendel State University. It was sent to the House of Assembly where it generated prolonged turbulent debate and highly politicised controversy. Through persuasive and coercive means involving extended dialogue and interaction between executive and legislature, wise counsel prevailed and the University Bill was passed. The role of the Honourable Speaker, Chief Benson Alegbe as mediator to quell the turbulence is commendable. The bill was signed into Law on July 14, 1981.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE UNIVESITY

In the pursuance of the take-off of the University, Governor Alli appointed Prof. M. I. Ogbeide as the Vice Chancellor and Mr. S. A. Kalulu as the Registrar. A firm of Academic Planners with Mrs. S. A. Aluko (Director of Planning at UNIBEN) as its Director was commissioned to prepare a long term physical and academic Master Plan for the University.

Operating from temporary hired quarters in Benin City, the two principal officers made trips to Ekpoma in search of physical infrastructure for the take-off of the University. With the co-operation of the Onojie of Ekpoma and Emaudo Community, a large parcel of land was made available for the permanent site of the University. Negotiations with the Okpebho Local Government authorities also led to the allocation of part of the Secretariat as offices for pioneer staff. A media advert for academic recruitment tours by the Vice Chancellor. The applications received were overwhelming. The first set of administrative staff to be recruited included Mr. S. O. Utomakili as Bursar, Engr F. O. A. Osawe as Director of Works Services and Messrs R. O. Okodugha and Dele Arekamhe as Principal Assistant Registrars respectively.

The first academic members who joined its early stage were Prof. V. E.

Aimakhu who was Rector of the College of Medical Sciences and Mr. Polycarp Umoru was a Graduate Assistant in the College of Natural Sciences. These full time academic and administrative staff conducted the entrance examination that led to the admission of the first set of 400 students. In preparation to receive the students, some disused dormitories at Annunciation Catholic College, Irrua were taken over and modified into temporary hostels. The same was done at Ujoelen Grammar School where additional facilities for cafeteria services were required. The co-operation of the principals in providing these facilities as well as classrooms were very encouraging. Private buildings were rented for use as female hostels and indigenes were very helpful in assisting to meet the needs of staff and students

Although all hands appeared to be on deck to ensure that the target of opening the University on January 15, 1982 was met, the Governor felt that all was not well. This compelled him to pay a surprise visit to Ekpoma on January 18, 1982. On observing that some officers still lived outside Ekpoma, he relieved the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar of their posts on January 21, 1982 even though the pioneer 408 students were already around. During this period of uncertainty of about one week, Government quickly put in place the Governing Council under the chairmanship of Dr. Abel Ubeku. The Council was inaugurated on 27th January, 1982 and it immediately appointed Prof. Aimakhu as Acting Vice-Chancellor and Mr. R. Okodugha as acting Registrar. The new chief executive rose up to the challenge to restore public confidence in the University by arranging orientation activities for the new students and registration for courses and commencement of academic activities. This involved speedily contacting Lecturers from neighbouring tertiary institutions who were willing to assist on part-time basis. Part-time Lecturers came from as far as Lagos and Ibadan. Between February and March, lectures had commenced in the humanities and sciences.

## KEEPING THE FAITH

Three important events took place in rapid succession which went a long way to consolidate efforts of founding the University. The first was the inauguration of the Governing Council on 27th January, 1982. The second was the first matriculation ceremony on 8th February, 1982 and the third was the Foundation Stone Laying ceremony on 29th March, 1892.

The inauguration of the Governing Council with Dr. A. K. Ubeku as Chairman gave the Governor Alli another opportunity of explaining the reason for the establishment of the University and to challenge the members of on

such a firm and Just ground that it could stand the test of time. Prof. Alli stated as follows: &ldquo;&hellip;The policy of free education at all levels for indigenes of Bendel State is aimed at destroying permanently the exclusiveness of education and the monopoly thereof which only the children of the wealthy families enjoyed. Free education at all levels also represents a honest intention to democratize educational opportunities as well as encourage the even distribution of educational faculties throughout the State. It is our determination to make Bendel State one of the most educationally advanced States in the federation by removing all bottlenecks in the educational system. It is common knowledge that in this country, in spite of the thirteen existing Universities, many Nigerian Students are unable to find places in these Universities. Some are therefore obliged to go abroad, if they have necessary funds, in search of University or tertiary education. It is to meet these felt needs that my government decided to establish as a concrete demonstration of our efforts to liberalize and widen educational opportunities for all those with the potentialities and thereby narrow the existing gaps&hellip;&rdquo;

The first matriculation ceremony on February 8, 1982 was another milestone attended by many dignitaries including the Visitor and Governor of the State, Professor Ambrose Alli, HRH Onojie of Ekpoma, M. A. Akhimien II, members of the Governing Council, civil Commissioners, top civil servants and thousands of well wishers and relatives of matriculating students. The theme of the Acting Vice-Chancellor&rsquo;s address &lsquo;Great Things have small beginnings&rsquo; was reflective of the increasing confidence that had been stimulated by the remarkable achievements of the University within such a short time. A total of 408 students were matriculated as detailed below. They had been selected from over 15000 applicants showing heavy demand for the University even at its inception.

College of Arts and Social Science - 145

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources - 58

College of Education - 44

College of Engineering and Technology - 22

College of Environmental Design - 36

College of Legal Studies - 51

College of Medical Science - 20

College of Natural Science - 32

Perhaps

the most glorious day in the University was the day of official opening and laying of the Foundation Stone on March 29, 1982. It drew an unprecedented number of dignitaries from all parts of Nigeria and from all works of life. The event was also marked by the turning of the sod and the launching of an Endowment Fund. This foundation laying ceremony was performed by the Right Honourable Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Ovwelle of Onitsha and the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and was witnessed by the famous statesman, politician, educationist, legal luminary Chief Obafemi Awolowo, veteran politician, statesman and philanthropist Alhaji Waziri, Ibrahim, Governors of several States, traditional rulers, Federal and State legislators, legal luminaries and renowned academicians.

The Chief Launcher, Chief Hope Harriman, the Sobaloju of Ile-ife donated N100,000 while Chief Michael Ibru donated N50,000. Mr. Stephen Ehiemua (Mousco) N12,000, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe N10,000, Chief Obafemi Awolowo N10,000, Chief Jim Nwobodo N10,000, Mr. A. A. Egbor N10,000 and many others.

The

Governor seized the opportunity to again thank all who have supported the idea of the University. He took time to explain the reasons for decision to site the University at Ekpoma and assured that posterity would justify the action. He further reiterated the many reasons for the establishment of the University and appealed for public support since Government alone cannot meet the financial needs of the University.

## CONSOLIDATING THE EKPOMA EXPERIMENT

The

success of the above three events were enough to convince any critics and pessimists that the Ekpoma experiment was firmly on the success track. It was important not to spare any effort to maintain the tempo of infrastructural and other developments.

One area

in which the development was most pronounced was in recruitment of permanent staff as the University could not rely on part-time Lecturers for too long. There was an urgent need to recruit high calibre staff to establish the thirty-seven departments that had been proposed to take off in the second session. By April 1982, ten Professors had been offered appointments as follows:

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Dr. John E. A. Osemeikhian - Professor, Department of Physics

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Dr. Samuel Omo Asein - Professor, Department of English

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Dr. (Mrs) Agnes E. Uduebo - Professor, Botany

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Dr. J. U. Aisiku - Professor, Department of Education

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Prof. David Osifo - Professor, Engineering

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Dr. P. N. Egharevba - Professor, Biological Science

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Dr. A. Akinbode - Professor, Department of Geography

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Dr. Samuel U. Erivmo - Professor, Religious Studies

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Dr. R. K. Goel - Professor, Legal Studies

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Prof. A. K. Yesufu - Professor, Electrical/Electronics Engineering

Several

other academic and administrative appointments were made so that by the end of the session, the Vice-Chancellor was able to announce the appointment of 85 academic staff.

Another

area in which there was significant change was in the area of infrastructure. The Governing Council established a special task force to monitor the work of the contractors on the permanent site to ensure that activities commenced on the permanent site at the beginning of the second session. Over 90 prefabricated housing units had been completed to serve as classroom and office space and library while some others were reserved for student hostels.

As these

developments were in progress, an Academic Planning Committee (made up of internal and external academics some of who were not even in inanes of Bendel State but were contributors to the success of the bald venture) was working with the Master Planners to document all that would be needed to ensure a hitch free resumption of academic work in the second session and beyond. Space constraints will not permit a full list of the membership of this committee whose work provided the foundation for the standard of academic excellence of the University. The University is grateful to all of them for their support in time of need. It is however pertinent to mention that the Visitor, Chief Prof. Ambrose Alli attended some of the plenary sessions to show his total commitment to the survival of the University.

Although

the 1982/83 academic session began in November 12, 1982, the arrival of students was delayed till January 15, 1983 to allow extra time for the completion of infrastructural developments. Most activities were now taking place in the permanent site including Senate meetings. No wonder the Vice-Chancellor was so overjoyed that he titled his matriculation address 'The Promise Land'. The University had indeed arrived at the Promised Land but remaining on the promised land could be tougher and more demanding than getting there!