

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR DR. IFEANYI ARTHUR OKOWA, THE GOVERNOR OF DELTA STATE, ON THE INAUGURATION OF SKILLS TRAINING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME (STEP) AND YOUTH AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS PROGRAMME (YAGEP) ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2015, AT SONGHAI-DELTA, AMUKPE.

I gladly welcome all of you to this ceremony, the official inauguration of Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) of our Job and Wealth Creation Scheme.

2. Today's event is undeniable proof that our administration's S.M.A.R.T agenda is well and truly on course. It goes without saying that Job and wealth creation are the bedrock of the S.M.A.R.T agenda, with YAGEP and STEP as the flagship programmes.

3. Other programmes under the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme are Production and Processing Support Programme (PPSP), Development of Agro-Industries, and Extension of Microcredit. All the programmes have been strategically designed, stringently planned and specifically tailored to tackle the problem of youth unemployment and produce lasting and sustainable prosperity across board.

4. Our strategy for making this a reality is through focussed and concentrated efforts to stimulate the growth and development of Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs). While multinational companies and big corporations get all the public attention and acclaim for their capacity to induce foreign investment capital, MSMEs remain the backbone for economic growth and social development in any society.

5. By definition, MSMEs are companies that employ less than 250 persons and available statistics indicate that 97% of all businesses in Nigeria employ less than 100 persons. Meanwhile, they account for about 50% of Nigeria's productive workforce and 46.54% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The story is not different in other parts of the world. There are approximately 23 million small businesses in the USA and they employ more than 50% of the private workforce and generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, MSMEs account for 99.8% of all companies and 65% of business turnover in the European Union.

6. It is for this reason that this administration is very passionate, deliberate and focussed in our quest to formulate tangible and lasting policies and/or programmes to support the small business sector. The overarching goal of the job and wealth creation scheme is to equip participants with the technical know-how, vocational/technical skills, values and resources to become self-employed and employers of labour.

7. I am aware that there have been similar interventions in the recent history of our State. Unfortunately, these interventions did not deliver on their promises and, therefore, failed to meet the yearnings and aspirations of our people. Not surprisingly, some people have wondered if we are not just reinventing the wheel or going through the same motions without movement. My answer to that is a resounding NO! We carried out a thorough post-mortem of past initiatives in this regard and designed the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme to avoid their shortcomings.

8. The underlying difference is the desired end result. While previous programmes sought to prepare people for employment, the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme seeks to produce wealth creators and job creators. Critical differences also exist in the selection and screening process, training approach, management system, and collaboration with the organised private sector. In addition, this scheme is not your typical empowerment programme that is often cash based; it is a wealth and job creation scheme. It is not about skills acquisition; it is about building a knowledge economy.

9. The youth training and development is all encompassing and enduring in nature. It incorporates life skills, mind-set change, leadership and business management skills necessary for our participants to become successful entrepreneurs. To avoid the pitfalls of the past, a monitoring and mentoring mechanism has been incorporated into the scheme to track performance of participants and provide them counselling when necessary. Monitoring is aided by ICT-based information transmission, tracking and reporting technologies. This is expected to greatly reduce the number of drop-outs from the scheme, a major drawback with previous programmes

10. It is important for us to recognise these differences so that we can embrace the paradigm shift that the job and wealth creation scheme entails. And this is particularly so for our participants here today. I congratulate all of you for making it into the scheme. Beyond the colour and glamour of the day, I want you to know that this scheme is about taking your destiny in your own hands. It is an opportunity of a life time and I urge you to make the most of it.

11. Becoming an entrepreneur or a self-employed person is not a big deal neither is it rocket science. It is within reach of any person who will dare believe and go for it. Most successful entrepreneurs were not born; they were made. Or to put it another way, they made themselves. They made themselves, of course with the help of God, because they braved the odds and applied themselves rigorously to some of the things you will be learning in the course of your training.

12. You will be taking courses in leadership, personal effectiveness, resource management, and problem solving, among many other modules, to be facilitated by thoroughbred professionals and experienced resource persons; men and women with proven track records of success in business and leadership.

13. After This Orientation Programme, you are expected to proceed to various skills training centres to obtain the requisite necessary technical/vocational skills after which you will embark on an internship in an existing business set-up in your chosen field. The last week of your training will bring you back here to SONGHAI-DELTA for a rigorous and robust education in entrepreneurship and business management. Graduates will then be given starter packs to start their businesses.

14. The government is investing hugely in this programme and you will be doing yourself, your family and your community great disservice if you squander this opportunity. Training to become an entrepreneur gives you a headstart over some of your friends and colleagues in paid employment. Every employee, whether in the civil service or the private sector, will eventually retire into private business and God help that person who is not adequately prepared for life after paid employment.

15. You should, therefore, consider yourselves privileged to be getting the kind of training you have been receiving since the commencement of this Orientation Programme. Indeed, you are blessed and highly favoured to have been selected from a pool of over 70,000 applicants to commence this scheme. I expect you to make the most of this opportunity by diligently applying yourself to the training programme.

16. As forerunners of the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme, I charge you to be good ambassadors. You must lead by example and imbibe the qualities of discipline, focus, punctuality, hard work, and accountability that constitute the ingredients for success in life.

17. As I pointed out earlier, this scheme has a strong monitoring and mentoring component throughout the enterprise gestation period. If you are found wanting at any point in time, you will be asked to step aside. We are very serious about this scheme and only those who show the same amount of seriousness deserve to continue to enjoy support from the government.

18. Within one year of your graduation from this scheme it is my earnest prayer and desire to see some of you prospering in your businesses and making progress in your personal life. Your success is our success. In the not too distant future, I am confident that some of you will be back here as resource persons for future phases of this Job and Wealth Creation Scheme.

19. The scheme is being executed in successive phases and I want to encourage those who could not make it into this first phase to remain hopeful. The introduction of this scheme has enabled us to develop a database of the unemployed in the State. By the next six months when the next phase begins, we will simply pull out the next set of participants from the database. So there is opportunity for as many as are qualified to be enlisted in subsequent phases of the scheme.

20. Once again, congratulations to all of you participants, and I pray for your success in this journey.

21. I thank you all for listening.

22. God bless you.

23. God bless Delta State.

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GOVERNMENT HOUSE

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