

**OUR TOMORROW IN YOUR
HANDS**

BY

**CHIMA IBENECHÉ
MD/CEO
NIGERIA LNG LIMITED**

**AT THE
ANNUAL TEACHERS AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE**

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A truly special teacher is very wise, and sees tomorrow in every child's eyes.

Author Unknown

I was invited as distinguished guest speaker at this year's Teachers Award. This is an opportunity I could not ignore. First my father was primary school teacher and I have continued to admire what he epitomized. Secondly, I consider myself as a teacher even in my role as a manager of people. I believe that next to procreation, teaching is the other component of reproduction – we reproduce and extend the life of our cultures and civilization through teaching and learning.

I am therefore here to join Inoyo Toro Foundation and all of you to express our profound gratitude to a very special kind of people, our teachers whose roles are very vital to nurturing minds, molding characters and above all preserving civilization and culture. It is to me, therefore, a great honour and privilege to be your guest today.

Education which teachers enable, at least in a contributory way, is very important even though people may have different views of what it really is or should be. There are common threads that join all the various views – its importance to development and its role as a bridge between past, present and future. Ronald Regan, former president of the United States at the National Teachers Appreciation Day in 1958 defined it as a lifelong process that benefits individuals, entire communities and countries and helps lay the foundation for the future. Quality education cannot be underestimated. It is the key to development.

I think that quality education will be absolutely impossible without teachers. Our parents are perhaps are our first teachers, then our neighbours and eventually professional teachers in the kindergarten or primary school.

Teaching at the early stages not only imparts knowledge, but also lays the foundation for all learning, including self-learning. Because of this, teachers are central to learning and to education.

Good and great teachers are invaluable. I still remember how my father made me to learn the multiplication table or how he gave me a book by Mr. A.J. Carpenter on handwriting when he saw that my scribbles were totally illegible. During my secondary schools period, I encountered Mr. Ubani who made learning Biology such a joy that even today as an engineer and manager,

I dabble all the time in plant and animal taxonomy. Similarly, I remember Mr. Anyanwu who made it clear to me that all of Chemistry could be understood by knowing the periodic table. It was the keen interest of these teachers in both their subjects and their pupils that enabled them to find that key to learning that given to the pupil will make a lasting difference in his/her learning journey. All great teachers have this.

Great men such as Martin Luther King Jnr. and Mahatma Ghandi loved imparting knowledge. While on earth as man, our Lord Jesus Christ was always teaching. He was called the Master; the teacher, and He really was. Consider the parables he used to illustrate truths that are relevant in time and also in eternity. His style of using stories and mental pictures to convey difficult principles to pupils is one that is still used to good effect.

Great teachers are warm, accessible, enthusiastic and caring. They all love people. Teachers with these qualities are known to stay after school and make themselves available to students and parents who need them. These exceptional people spend extra hours planning lessons, correcting papers, thinking of innovative and creative ways to hold the short attention span of children, a number of whom are often thinking of play.

Unfortunately, not all who wear the moniker teachers are teachers. In our schools today we see traders who sell what little literacy they have for money. We have mercenaries who extort and exploit the young minds placed in their care. We have thieves who steal the innocence of young girls and boys in addition to stealing from the school. The consequence is that we turn out young people with distorted views of the world, who cannot trust in the altruistic goodness of people; people whose only purpose in life is to extract revenge on society.

Fortunately, the bad teachers are an aberration. We must all work to keep them in the minority even in the face of the powerful tendency, in our country today, to turn good teachers into bad.

We also know that in general, teachers are hardly ever fully appreciated nor adequately rewarded. This is not a Nigerian only issue, but appears widespread in the world. However, societies that reward teachers better tend to build better and more competitive societies. This is a message that Nigeria needs to pay heed to.

Adequate reward however is often in the eyes of the beholder. Indeed the teachers reward is held in heaven, but I add that it is revealed on earth. When I consider how many teachers' children do better in life than the children of far wealthier people of other professions, I can only conclude that God rewards teachers appropriately. This is because teachers who teach godly principles of hard work, diligence, discipline and contentment to their pupils also teach such values to their children at home. And these same principles go on to equip their children and wards for the success the eventually achieve. I should know; I am an example.

In addition to that divine reward, we must also reward teachers with our collective gratitude. We have chosen to pause and to say THANK YOU to all our teachers. That is why we are here.

The United Nations, recognizing the valuable role of teachers in development, have set aside a special day to show appreciation for all that a teacher does. World Teachers' Day is now celebrated globally; showing teachers their efforts are valued.

Many of our teachers have not received word of appreciation or even a thank you card before; they have never felt the tremendous joy of being appreciated for their work. There was a time when teachers were among the elite in our rural societies and in the emergent cities of Nigeria. Parents used to send their children to live with teachers to enable them learn not just knowledge but character. That in itself was reward to teachers – the high esteem in which they were held. But not so anymore!

However, today, Inoyo Toro Foundation represents all the students, parents, school owners and government officials, and on behalf of all these people, we say THANK YOU.

Inoyo Toro Foundation must be commended for joining the world in showing teachers how valuable they are. This is very remarkable, particularly in a society where every effort is made to lavish all attention on politicians and public office holders.

Teachers, we thank you for your guidance, for pointing the way to go, support and encouragement, admonishment and punishment, for setting targets and creating dreams, for your strictness and discipline. Thank you for putting your heart and soul into teaching your students. For your relentless

efforts in equipping us for the pursuit of our life goals and making us successful today we thank you.

We all together pray that the Almighty will give you His love and mercies. We pray that the Lord's blessings will follow your children and grandchildren. May the Almighty grant you divine health, peace, long life and prosperity.

CHIMA IBENECHÉ
4TH NOVEMBER, 2011
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