



## Opening Remarks by the Chairman, Dr. Ini J. Urua

**(C.Eng, MChemE)**

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Members of the National and State Assemblies

Board Members of Inoyo Toro Foundation

Invited Schools and Students

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to use this opportunity to welcome you all to this ceremony, the 2012 and the Fifth Annual Teachers Award Ceremony of the Inoyo Toro Foundation. As the Chairman of this event today, my primary duty is to oversee the award ceremony and introduce the Key Note Speaker.

Before formally introducing our distinguished speaker, permit me to make a few remarks to properly situate this event, the work of the Inoyo Toro Foundation and its relevance to sustainable economic development and growth in our dear state, Akwa Ibom State, in particular and Nigeria in general, as well as in the development of requisite local capacity to create, manage and retain wealth for the benefit of our peoples in future years.

### **Why are we gathering here today?**

To majority of us, it is to recognize and honour educators (teachers) in science who have excelled in educating our youth in their different subject areas. You are right.



However, I view your presence and mine here today differently - I consider this a forum for seeking ways to support and facilitate the deepening of knowledge of science and technology in our state, and consequently the nurturing and strengthening of local capacity for a wider application of science and technology in support of our socio-economic development, now and into the future.

### **Why is this important? It is important for a number of reasons;**

In today's economic environment, competition is not by 'muscles' but through knowledge, knowhow and capacity to create, develop and convert our natural endowments into economic goods and services and manage them sustainably into the future.

We now live in a knowledge society, and only those countries and states that consciously and continuously enable, encourage, inspire, and utilize science and technology and its application in meeting the needs of the society can survive into the future.

Other countries, States and Regions across the world are investing heavily in science and technology with a view to shaping the future and positioning their growing populations to benefit economically from this - they are not waiting and will not wait for developing countries and states to catch up with them.

Akwa Ibom State has a large array of natural endowments - Crude oil, Natural gas, Limestone, Gold, Salt, Silica Sand, Kaolin, Agriculture (Oil palm, Cassava, rubber, pulping wood, etc), and Aquaculture. With the requisite local capacity and knowhow to transform these natural endowments into goods and services of the future, we can be assured of an industrial state of infinite opportunities into the future.

To buttress this point further, for those of us who followed the 2012 American electioneering process, President Obama, stated the following:



***"Scientific knowledge and new technologies are the building blocks for long-term economic growth - the key to a 21st-century economy"***

he went further to elaborate on how investments in the teaching of mathematics and science in schools is pivotal to the achievement of this objective. We can see from here that even countries considered as bastions of technological innovations and technology based enterprises are investing heavily in science and technology to catalyse their future economic development and growth.

What does this mean in terms of developing scientific and technological talents in our state? In my view, it calls for concerted actions by all (not just the government) to ensure that our youth, the future of our state, have early, sound and solid grounding in science and technology. They must be adequately motivated, inspired, coached, mentored and above all supported to excel in science and technology as they grow to become young adults.

This can be achieved if we have a critical mass of knowledgeable educators (teachers) in science and technology who themselves are inspired and motivated to coach our youth in these disciplines - this is the central objective of the Inoyo Toro Foundation.

For our young students here present and in our various schools and institutions, you also have a great part to play in inspiring your teachers and motivating them to put in extra effort to cement a solid foundation for your development and growth - hard work, dedication, and readiness to explore are the necessary ingredients.

Notwithstanding this, just having capable teachers is not enough. With rapid changes in technology, and new developments in science, the educators must have access to new data, systems, information and materials to appropriately prepare our youth for the future. A wider application of e-education in all schools will facilitate and accelerate this.



Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

Permit me at this juncture to commend the Government of Akwa Ibom State for implementing bold schemes in physical infrastructure, Education - through the free primary education scheme, and the vision to create an e-library for the state, amongst other(s). We all can anticipate a well-connected state, where

- all schools are linked up and can have ready access to a wide array of materials necessary for students, educators and researchers as well as direct linkage to other institutions within and outside the country,
- government services are online to ensure wider access as well as a reduction in the cost of providing and accessing services,
- hospitals are e-enabled to ensure that optimal medical services are available and new procedures and systems are accessible to our doctors and medical professionals,
- Farmers and businesses can access new processes, products, and market information to be able to adapt and compete.

Majority of us here present, in our formative years, did not have the benefit of good and functional transport infrastructure which is currently being delivered by the Akwa Ibom State Government. It is therefore important that such infrastructural assets are maintained and added upon. With the necessary local capacity and knowhow, we can see existing infrastructure serving our peoples into the future and becoming a selling point for crowding in new investment opportunities in all spheres of Endeavour into the state. The converse is a rapid deterioration and dilapidation of existing infrastructure asset and reversion to the past.

While I have focused on the centrality of science and technology for the future economic development of our state, this does not by any means diminish the importance of other



areas, e.g, Social Sciences, Arts, and Political Development in the total equation for shaping and defining our future. These aspects are equally important and we as a people should, as demonstrated by the Inoyo Toro Foundation, support our governments in developing, nurturing and inspiring our youths to ensure that they acquire relevant knowledge, knowhow, and capacity to support our socio-economic development into the future.

Current trends in our state and other states in our country, where our youths fight, maim, and annihilate each other to become politically relevant and attain political supremacy must be discouraged. This can be done by assuring them that there is a brighter future for one and all – this assurance can only be manifested if opportunities in industries, infrastructure development and delivery, new product development, business activities, services and service provision, etc are readily available to engage and absorb our youths. Quality education, capacity building and mentoring is a key element in ensuring that the youth acquire the necessary knowledge and knowhow to shape the future of our state.

Let me recall a conversation I had with a colleague a few years ago - he said, "Ini, politics is everything, you are in or out" - Let me say that politics is NOT everything, and certainly not the politics of entitlement - but yes politics of socio-economic development, politics of managing and transforming our commonwealth, politics of industrial development, to name a few, are it.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to use this opportunity to urge and encourage you to support the Inoyo Toro Foundation and other such organizations and institutions devoted to capacitating and preparing our youths to become leaders, innovators, managers, and shapers of the future of our state and peoples.



As someone who has visited and worked in almost all the countries of Africa as well as in many continents of the world, I have come to realize the immense opportunities that our country has and can offer, and also that which Akwa Ibom state has and can offer. We can only make these endowments work positively for us through applying our knowledge and knowhow in adding value locally and transforming our natural endowments, including human capacity into world class products and services.

I am conscious that we are a very religious society. The subject matter of ensuring that we lay a solid foundation is explicitly reflected in Mathew 7: 24-25 - build your house on the solid rock. Education is a solid foundation to which we must build for the future generation.

Our future is in our hands - we must build on our recent achievements by ensuring that generation of Akwa Ibomites to come have a solid base to forge a sustainable future for our state.

Thank you.