



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA

WELCOME ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARIAN/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PROFESSOR CHINWE VERONICA ANUNOBI AT THE FLAG-OFF OF THE ANNUAL READERSHIP PROMOTION CAMPAIGN HOLDING AT THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ON 8TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

The Minister of Education,

The Minister of State for Education

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education,

The Directors-General of Agencies under Ministry of Education,

Director, Library Services, Ministry of Education,

International Agencies present,

Members of the Fourth Estate,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this remarkable occasion of the annual Readership Promotion Campaign of the National Library of Nigeria which forms part of the statutory mandates of the apex library of the nation. It is a call on all Nigerians to embrace the habit of reading culture in order to eradicate the rate of illiteracy in Nigeria.

The objectives of the Campaign are to encourage reading amongst Nigerians by way of promoting the availability of good reading materials to Nigerians and collectively seeking solutions to address identified obstacles to reading culture in Nigeria. The Campaign is

designed to capture all the Thirty Six {36} States of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory {FCT}, Abuja with a focus on making donation of books and other reading materials to Primary and Secondary Schools. In the past, Readership Promotion Campaign was being carried out by visiting places such as Internally Displaced Persons {IDPs} Camps, visits to the Nigerian Correctional Centers as well as the Hospitals and Motor Parks.

The campaign is not the first of its kind but a continuous effort put together by my predecessors to sensitize the general public on the importance of reading culture. It started in year ¹⁹⁸2006 when National Library discovered that one of its mandates is to promote reading culture amongst Nigerians. The Campaign from 2006 to 2015 were limited to Capital cities where primary and secondary schools were being invited. From year 2006 - 2009, the Readership Promotion Campaign was held in International Conference Centre, Abuja. In 2010, it was moved outside Abuja to Edo State Capital, Benin City and it was rotated amongst the remaining five (5) geo-graphical zones.

This challenge is to address the low reading culture among all segments in Nigeria, especially the children. The children who are poor in reading are struggling with issues of academic, emotional and social issues. Children who are behind their peers in reading, struggle with low esteem and feeling of inadequacies, low achievements in reading is also the common denominator in school discipline, attendance and drop-outs problems, and juvenile crime. Of course, lack of reading produces social malaise like yahoo boys, drug addicts, 419, cheats in public examinations and get-rich syndrome which are common these days.

However according to the World Culture Score Index, Nigeria has been rated as one of the countries in the world with the lowest reading culture, while available statistics from the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education shows that 38 percent

of Nigerians are non-literate as four in ten primary school children cannot read properly and this is as a result of poor reading culture in Nigeria which includes defective education system, reading language problem, lack of well-equipped or functional libraries in schools and low patronage of school libraries, among others.

Furthermore, I want to reiterate the importance of setting up of Workshops and Trainings for Nigerian students and youths. There is urgent need to revive library and library hours in Schools, also encourage the Inter School Essay Writings and debates, competition should be organized for Nigerian Students to encourage them to engage in serious reading habits to defeat their opponents during such debates which in the end, the Country enjoys the benefit.

The intention of moving away from Capital city to the hard-to-reach is borne out of the fact that majority of people between the ages six to eighteen live in rural areas with no access to any educational materials that can encourage them to take up the culture of reading. In this instance, we are targeting the hard-to-reach with materials such as **literature books, maps, markers and tablets** which will be given to those who come first in the competition throughout the country. We will identify those to teach them how to read and write, not only in western type but the mother tongue. Teaching them in mother tongue is very crucial as many languages are going into extinction.

Honorable Minister, reading culture is seriously going down as the system permits it. Look at the huge amount placed on the Big Brother Africa, Big Brother Naija {BBN} and Ultimate Gulder Search, while meager prizes were placed on Cowbell Mathematical competitions etc. It saddens one's heart that huge resources are being placed on these pedestrian issues and leaving the key areas to the Nigerians future prosperity.

The task of building a nation of reading requires total collaboration especially from stakeholders like Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Commission (SUBEC), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other individuals.

I also want to encourage all stakeholders to embark on regular Campaign Programs for the donation of free books to Nigerian Students.

Ladies and Gentlemen, building a strong reading culture puts reading at the forefront of school improvement. A creative and exciting reading culture not only breeds capable and committed readers, it boosts wellbeing of Nigerians as well as develops the Country economically, socially and technologically. There is a necessity to revamp the reading culture to bridge the Country's knowledge gap. Facts and information are sparingly compiled as manned to drive businesses and while this happens no one cares to read it. In Nigeria, there is shortage of knowledge because the reading culture is very poor.

This year's campaign has its theme **"Reading as a Panacea for Societal Problems"** with the following Sub- theme:

a. Inculcating Reading Habits in a Changing World: A tool for sustainable Economic Development, Continuous Education and Social Inclusion. The intention is to address seemingly unconcerned majority of us uninterested in reading from the grassroots and to educate them on the importance of reading.

Lacking basic reading and writing skills is a tremendous disadvantage. Literacy not only enriches an individual's life, but it creates

opportunities for people to develop skills that will help them provide for themselves and their family.

I therefore urge all Nigerians to embrace the reading habit which will improve the literacy level of not just the person but the Country at large. I also urge all stakeholders to donate books to schools and Institutions of learning, help support the promotion of reading campaign, start community lending of reading materials in order to eliminate illiteracy in Nigeria.

It is in the light of this that I humbly invite the Honorable Minister of Education Malam Adamu Adamu to flag-off the commencement of the National Library of Nigeria' s 2022 Readership Promotion Campaign.

Thank you.