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Institute for Industrial Technology in Lagos, Nigeria

A new social initiative, a technical training program, has begun in Lagos, Nigeria. The organizers see the program as a Centennial "birthday present" for Blessed Josemaria.

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The Institute for Industrial Technology (IIT) is a social project aimed at imparting technical skills

and knowledge with ethical values to young out-of-school-youths and also to adult workers from the less privileged sector of society.

In Nigeria with its estimated 120 million people, most of its citizens live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate is near 60%. IIT is open to people from all tribes and religions. Its aim is to provide high-level education so that all its graduates become highly qualified.

Interview with Darlington Agholor, administrative director of the institute.

Who inspired the idea of such a project?

This project, like many similar other social projects all over the world, has come out as a result of the impulse of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. He was greatly concerned about helping the less

privileged members of our society to improve their social conditions, such that they could obtain the needed resources to live more dignified lives. We learned from his deep Christian charity that made him see in everyone a child of God. He was emphatic in stating that, "No one is better than anyone else, no one! We are equal! Each one of us is worth the same, each person is worth Christ's blood!" He encouraged us, as he did to his spiritual children in other countries, to begin as soon as possible, together with other well-meaning citizens, a technical school in order to provide skills and a solid Christian formation to as many people as possible of this vast country. We are conscious of carrying out his desire. On March 27, 2000 the IIT took in the first batch of 10 trainees. Small beginning for an ambitious dream!

On January 9 2002, it will be 100 years since the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. This technical school, is a sort of birthday gift to him on the Centenary of his birth, a humble monument, because in his honor and in gratitude to him for bequeathing to us the spirit of Opus Dei — sanctity through ordinary work — we have set it up. The legacies of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá are unquantifiable, and so whatever is done in gratitude will always be too small. It is our hope that this school will stand for many years to come in testimony to this gratitude and devotion of ours.

What training methods do you use in IIT?

We employ the Dual-Training system, first used by the Germans and then later in the Philippines. It is a system of educational training whereby the student alternately spends time at

two venues of learning: the school and the factory floor in beautiful synergy. Whereas the school provides general and basic education, including aspects of culture, social and moral formation, the factory provides the necessary 'real life', hands-on experience, where one also learns to work with other people.

The school has three main programs: A 3-year Electro-mechanics course for young secondary school leavers between 18 and 21 years old; a 2-year Electro-mechanics course for workers, and short term courses.

A clear edge, which the trainees here have, is that we prepare them to become multi-skilled technicians. Whereas their counterparts are trained only in a certain area (say mechanical for instance), our trainees are prepared to become experts in electrical, mechanical,

electronics and automation. In time the course content will be even broader.

What is the situation with technical education in Nigeria?

Nigeria has never really given due priority to technical education as an economic mainstay, a fact which is being recently acknowledged by many government officials.

Countries like Germany were able to bounce back after the Second World War due to the importance they gave to technical education. Manual skills have for long been looked down upon here, with the result that Nigerians have mainly sought university education as the only dignified work option. With such a bias in favor of "white-collar" jobs, even the few polytechnics and technical schools set up by the government have not been able to change these misplaced attitudes.

The result has been that products of these schools are not properly prepared, lack motivation and remain jobless.

When industries recruit graduates of technical schools, they have to re-train them in order to shore up their technical skills. Considering that these industries lack the capacity to re-train too many, a lot of them ultimately remain unemployed.

Running its own technical schools has also proved not to be in the best interest of companies, for whom it constitutes a distraction from their primary focus, lacking as they do the required commitment and investment. IIT is therefore a necessity both to the individual and to the industry.

The training in IIT will adequately prepare those who after their training would desire to set up on their own, to be self-reliant.

Considering the technological skills imparted to these trainees at IIT, they will be much sought after by employers in the industries and services.

What is the response from local industries?

From the beginning, collaboration from local industries has been very positive. The most important contributor has so far been the company whose premises we are leasing for the time being, i.e. the Carnaud Metal Box (CMB).

Following discussions with them an agreement was reached on May 28, 1999 with the management to lease the premises of their former training school, located within the factory premises at Ogba Industrial Estate, Ikeja. They also gave us several lathe machines and other training equipment. Other industries have

also given donations of machines to help our training.

Industry collaboration will be ongoing as a result of the Dual-Training system as "Partner Companies" will assist in the factory aspect of the training.

Almost on a daily basis, industrial experts visit IIT to see things for themselves and all of them are full of hope, enthusiasm and praise.

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