

## The Late Prof. Donald E. U. Ekong (1933 – 2005)



Prof. Donald E. U. Ekong was born on December 31, 1933, in Afaha Ibesikpo to the family of Chief E. U. Ekong and Mrs Arit Ekong. He had his primary education in Afaha Ibesikpo, and his secondary education at Government College, Umuahia. He attended the University College Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) where he obtained a first class honours degree (special) in chemistry in 1957.

On graduation, he went for further studies at Heidelberg University in the Federal Republic of Germany, and earned a doctorate in 1962, under the supervision of Prof. Richard Kuhn, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry.

From 1962 to 1963, he conducted post-doctoral research at the Cambridge University with Prof. Lord Todd, who also became a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry.

He returned to Nigeria shortly after and joined the faculty of the University of Ibadan as a lecturer in chemistry. While at the University of Ibadan, he advanced his research interest in the field of natural products chemistry and made principal scientific contributions on terpenoids chemistry and the chemistry of plants of West Africa. He also played a major role in the development of graduate studies and research in the University and led an active research. In 1971, he was promoted to the rank of Professor of Chemistry, and he subsequently became Head of the Department of Chemistry.

1973 marked a turning point in his career. He moved from teaching and research into university management and development of higher education.

From 1973-75, he was the founding Principal of the University of Nigeria, Calabar Campus. In 1975, he was appointed the founding principal of the University College, Port Harcourt (now University of Port Harcourt). When that institution became a full-fledged university, he was appointed its first Vice-Chancellor. He served as vice-chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt from 1977 – 1982. From 1982 to 1983, he was a visiting professor of Chemistry at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. In 1983, he was appointed the founding Vice Chancellor of the University of Cross River State, Uyo. He held this post until 1987. From 1987-1995, he was the Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities. From 1996-1998, he was a Scholar-in-Residence at the Ford Foundation Office in South Africa. In 1999, he was appointed the founding Vice Chancellor of the University of The Gambia. He served as Vice Chancellor until 2004.

As founding Principal, University of Nigeria, Calabar Campus, he established and nurtured the academic programmes and the administrative management of the Campus until it became a full-fledge University in 1975. As founding Principal /Vice-Chancellor, University of Port Harcourt, he was responsible for setting up the management and academic structures of the University, including its general and academic policies, initiating staff development programmes and overseeing the physical planning and construction of the campus. By the end of his term, the University had already achieved considerable reputation. As founding Vice-Chancellor, University of Cross River State, he was responsible for setting up the management and academic structures of the University, academic policies, audits and recruitment.

As Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Association of African Universities 1987-1995, he contributed to the re-emergence of the Association as a major and credible international organization for addressing higher education issues in Africa; co-directed several of the Association's studies on higher education in Africa; initiated and co-directed the senior University management (SUMA) training workshops for African Universities Vice Chancellors/Rectors; initiated, developed and managed strong liaison and collaboration between the Association and major international agencies and organizations, with interest in higher education in Africa including the World Bank, UNESCO, Donors to African

Education/Working Group on Higher Education, foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie; the British Council, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Department of Research Cooperation of the Swedish International Development Agency (SAREC) and several other bilateral government agencies, which resulted in substantial external support for the programmes of the Association. He infused energy, and restored honour and credibility to the Association.

Prof. Ekong has rendered other services at the national and international levels, with distinction. At the national level, he has served as:

- Chairman, Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, 1981-82
- Chairman, Joint Admission & Matriculations Board for Nigerian Universities, 1979-82
- First Chairman, Governing Council of the Calabar Polytechnic, Calabar, Nigeria, 1972-82
- Member, Natural Sciences Research Council of Nigeria, 1973-76.

On the international scene, Prof. Donald Ekong has served as:

- External member, University Council, University of Botswana 1998 – 2002
- Member, Council of the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, 1984-1986, 1995-2001
- Member, UNESCO Consultative Group for an international programme on University-Industry interactions in Chemistry and Chemical Sciences for Development, 1977-84
- Member, Governing Board/Council of International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) 1982-89
- Editor, Journal of West African Science Association and member of the Council of the Association, 1964-74.

Apart from over 40 scientific publications on natural products chemistry and organic geochemistry, major contributions to scientific development and eleven commissioned publications on higher education development and management in Africa, Prof. Ekong has received international honours as follows:

In February, 2005, The President of Gambia accorded Professor Ekong a posthumous national honor of Order of The Republic of the Gambia.

Honoured by the Association of African University as its 9<sup>th</sup> General Conference in Lusaka, Zambia (1997) “for service to the Association, devotion and commitment of the development of higher education in Africa”.

Honoured by the Donors of African Education/Working Group on Higher Education (1996) “for outstanding service and dedication to the development of African Universities”.

Honoured by the University of Lesotho (1995) “for leadership role and outstanding contributions in the development of education in Africa”.

He holds honorary D.Sc. degrees from the following universities: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (2001), University of Calabar (2001), University of Uyo (1994), and University of Port Harcourt (1988).

He is a founding fellow of the following academies: African Academy of Sciences (1986), Third World Academy of Sciences (1985), Nigerian Academy of Sciences (1977), and Science Association of Nigeria. He equally holds an honorary traditional Chieftaincy title from the Paramount Traditional Ruler of Uyo (1995), “for services to University Education”.

Prof. Ekong is survived by his wife, Dr. (Mrs.) Afi Ekong, four children, three grand-children, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces.