

INTRODUCTION

SIMEON OKO AJEGI: THE MAN, THE JOURNEY, THE ACADEMIC GIANT

Professor Simeon Oko Ajegi's sojourn on earth began on an Ihigile market day, 15th October, 1954, while his heavily pregnant mother was returning from the market. Born to the Ajegi Enuma family of the Okanko dynasty in Ameka – Owo of Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, young Simeon's educational journey started at St. Thomas' Primary School Oju, ending at St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Ito in 1965. In January, 1966, young Simeon enrolled at the prestigious Mt. St. Michael's Secondary School, Aliade from where he graduated with Division One in the West African School Certificate Examinations. Being rated among the best five students academically in his set, he was selected to register and write the highly competitive national joint Sixth Form common entrance examination for admission into the then six existing federal government colleges reserved for "the best of the best".

Professor Ajegi scaled both the examination and subsequent interview and eventually got enrolled at the Federal Government College, Sokoto for the two-year course of the Higher School Certificate programme that prepared students for admission into tertiary institutions. Again, he excelled and was admitted into the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University in 1974 for the B.Sc. Economics programme, which he obtained with a Second Class Upper Division in 1977. His unquenchable thirst for academic advancement took him to the University of Jos in 1990 from where he bagged the M.Sc degree in Economics. Not yet done academically, Professor Ajegi enrolled for the PhD programme of the Benue State University in 2007, graduating with a PhD Economics in 2014.

Professor Ajegi began his working life as a participant in the one-year mandatory National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC) where he was posted to Mbube East Secondary School, Oboso in Cross River State as a classroom teacher between 1st August, 1977- 31st July, 1978. Upon completion of his national service, Professor Ajegi joined the

Benue State Civil Service in the Ministry of Education in 1978 where at various times was a classroom teacher (GTC, Vandeikya), Vice Principal (GTC, Adoka), Principal (GSS, Ito between Dec. 1980 – March, 1983) and Lecturer (SBS, Makurdi). He also served meritoriously as the Acting Head, Department of Social Sciences, School of Remedial Studies (SRS), Makurdi between January 1990 and November 1992. In December, 1992, Professor Ajegi was duly employed as a lecturer in the Department of Economics, Benue State University Makurdi, where he rose through the ranks to become a Professor in 2018.

During his eventful years as an erudite scholar, Professor Ajegi served the Benue State University Makurdi in various capacities. He served as the Faculty of Social Sciences Examinations Officer (October 1995-October 1997), Faculty of Social Science Representative to Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) and Postgraduate School (PGS) in May 2014 and October 2014 respectively. He had also been a two-time Acting Head, Department of Economics (November 2000 – October 2004 and January 2017-February 2019 respectively). During the course of his stewardship, he had also graciously participated in several committees and community development efforts in the University. He was the Chairman, ASUU BSU Thrift and Cooperatives (2013–2015), Member, Sub-Committee on Stakeholders Forum/Exhibition for 13th Convocation and 20th Anniversary Celebration in 2013, Member, Benue State University Senate (2000-2004 and 2018 to date respectively) and Member, Senate Estimates Committee (2000-2004).

As a distinguished scholar of high repute, Professor Ajegi has extensively published several articles in both local and international journals, including books and technical reports. He is a development economist, with special research interest in development finance, rural banking and public policy. He has taught several courses and supervised students research at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Before his official retirement from the services of the Benue State University Makurdi in October 2024, he had been a visiting lecturer to several universities at various times, including University of Mkar, Kwara University Wukari and Federal University

Wukari, where he significantly impacted his worth of experience towards the upliftment of the academic standard of those institutions. His academic prowess was also expressed in several dimensions including his appointment as the External Examiner to University of Mkar, Kwararafa University Wukari and Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba. He also spent his sabbatical leave at Federal University Lafia and Taraba State University Jalingo. In each of these places, he had demonstrated hard work and commitment to the course of sustaining academic culture and integrity.

Professor Ajegi is not only an academic. He is also a community leader, a motivator, a father, and an inspiration to many people around him. For instance, he has been an active member of the Ameka-Owo Development Association and Owo Development Association since 1986, Treasurer, Igede, Development Association, Makurdi Branch (1988 – 1990), Secretary General, Igede Development Association (1990 – 1992) and a Member, Administrative Commission of Inquiry into the Students' Disturbances at the College of Education, Oju (2009). Here too, his academic expertise and moral integrity were brought to the bare. Professor Ajegi is a tested and trusted scholar, a genius, an image maker and a doting mentor. He is a special *brand of excellence* in every sphere of life. One distinctive trait of Professor Ajegi is his jovial and peaceful nature. His unique and motivational style of leadership speaks volumes of him.

In the political sphere too, Professor Ajegi is not left out. He recently contested as the Deputy Governor (running mate to Pastor Dr. Frederick Ikyaan) of Benue State under the platform of Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) in the 2019 Gubernatorial election.

As a pioneer staff, he is one of the founding fathers of the Department of Economics, Benue State University Makurdi. Coincidentally, albeit not, Professor Ajegi was the **second** Head of Department, a **two-time** Head and the **second** person to officially retire from the Department. This is quite a significant and historical to the Department of Economics, Benue State University.

Professor Ajegi is happily married to Mrs Ruth Ajegi and the marriage is blessed with 8 children. His hobbies include reading, watching sports activities and travelling.

This book is written as a special testament to mark the celebration of the monumental contributions of an academic icon, a political leader, a great mentor, a teacher, a friend and father, Professor Simeon Oko Ajegi to humanity and particularly Benue State University Makurdi. As he officially disengages from the services of the University, it is obvious that the seeds sown over the years have already grown and his legacy is already noticeable on the sands of time. Prof Ajegi, though retired, is certainly not tired and theres reason to believe that the latter glory will be greater yet.