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Highlights of NUC's Impact Assessment Study of Equipment Maintenance Project in Federal Universities

The National Universities Commission (NUC) in collaboration with the then Overseas Development Agency (ODA) and European Economic Community (EEC), in 1986, set up five pilot Equipment Maintenance and Development Centres (EMDCs) in five Nigerian Federal Universities at Zaria, Ile-Ife, Nsukka, Calabar and Bauchi. The aim of the project was to establish maintenance culture in Nigerian Universities.

The pilot centres served as models for other universities to draw experience and expertise for establishing their own Equipment Maintenance Centres (EMCs). The facility support from the World Bank in 1996 was used to establish the EMCs in the remaining universities except those at Uyo, Awka, Abuja and Umudike. The National Universities Commission and the Universities have been supporting the efforts of the EMDCs and EMCs since 1997.

After over two decades of running the project, the National Universities Commission considered it necessary to assess the impact of the project on curriculum delivery and to determine the level to which the project has met its objectives. More importantly, the NUC Management in active collaboration with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC) of Nigerian Universities is poised to revamp, retool, rekit and effectively resuscitate all the EMDC's and ensure their sustainability.

Five teams were constituted by the NUC Management to carry out the impact assessment. Each team visited between four to six universities within the zone it was assigned. In carrying out the survey, three instruments were used, namely, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and questionnaire administration.

The interactions and questionnaires revealed quite a lot on the operations of the EMDCs/EMCs. The impact assessment revealed that:

- (1) Majority of the centres are still struggling to operate to expectation;
- (2) The common problem to virtually all the EMDCs/EMCs is poor funding and lack of support by the University Management;
- (3) Another area of concern is lack of staff training and inadequacy of technical staff. Most of the technologists and technicians are quite competent on repairing older equipment (which they had used to develop their skills over time) but find it difficult to repair state of the art equipment due to lack of adequate training and exposure on them;

- (4) The non-availability of spare parts to effect repair when an equipment has been diagnosed also hinders the smooth operations of the centres. Some universities complained of lack of regular power supply, tools, workshop space, and utility vehicle among others;
- (5) These problems notwithstanding, the technologists and technicians are able to maintain some of the equipment using the experience acquired over time and the willingness to face challenges and surmount them;
- (6) The university management, technologists and technicians agree that the centres are central to the maintenance of equipment in the universities and should therefore assist to draw up equipment specifications during procurement exercise;
- (7) The general opinion was that the project has impacted positively on curriculum delivery even though it has not met all its objectives;
- (8) Respondents unanimously agree that NUC's support is necessary towards achieving the goals and objectives of the project. In this regard, it is expected that the NUC should encourage the universities to make their EMCs functional and well equipped.
- (9) The summary of the harvests of the assessment exercise which was administered to 251 persons in all the Federal universities is captured in the table shown below;

Summary of the Respondents' degree of agreement with the following statements

Statements	Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Don't Know (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
	frq.	%	frq.	%	frq.	%	frq.	%	frq.	%
The equipment maintenance project activities have impacted positively on the functionality of equipment in the institution.	94	37.5	95	37.8	24	9.6	27	10.8	11	4.4
The equipment maintenance project activities have impacted positively on cost savings in the institution.	77	30.7	87	34.7	40	15.9	31	12.4	16	6.4
The project has greatly improved curriculum delivery	48	21.1	58	25.6	44	19.4	49	21.6	28	12.3
The project has slightly improved curriculum delivery	19	9.3	41	20.1	53	26.0	50	24.5	41	20.1
The project has not improved curriculum delivery	15	6.7	25	11.2	54	24.2	79	35.4	50	22.4
The project has had no effect on curriculum delivery	3	4.0	5	6.7	12	16.0	26	34.7	29	38.7
Others (Specify)										

The concept of equipment maintenance through the activities of EMDCs and EMCs has been widely accepted by virtually all Universities visited. The following general recommendations were made consequent upon results of the impact assessment survey:

- 1) The centres are impacting positively on curriculum delivery where they exist and have been achieving the purpose for which they were set up thus justifying additional support of the NUC.
- 2) The funding of the centres should be enhanced. The NUC in consultation with CVC should agree to set aside 4% of the funds for Teaching and Research Equipment for maintenance activities in each university and an additional 1% for centrally coordinated activities by the NUC for training on equipment repair, and workshops on equipment maintenance and other support services (e.g. monitoring) of the EMDCs.
- 3) An equipment procurement and maintenance policy should be advocated for each University whereby the advice of the EMDCs/EMCs is obtained before the purchase of a new piece of equipment. This is to ensure that technical suitability and viability of the piece of equipment are accorded due consideration in the procurement process.
- 4) A Central laboratory should be set up in each University where expensive equipment required by many departments for teaching and research could be pooled. This will greatly minimize, if not entirely abolish, duplication of such equipment, cost of their maintenance and repairs.
- 5) The NUC should resuscitate the forum where Directors and Chairmen of EMDCs and EMCs interact to further promote the collaboration and sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- 6) The University of Abuja and the University of Agriculture, Umudike, should be urged to collaborate with the EMDC in their zone towards the establishment of an EMC in these institutions.