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AOOF: Dedication to an academic's vision

By **Wale Emosu**



Mrs. Funmi Egbedayo (right) presenting a scholarship award to one of the beneficiaries.

THE achievements of Dr. Abel Ogundokun Odeleye, the man reputed to be the first African to have studied up to the doctoral level by correspondence, were re-echoed recently when his children and their associates gathered for the annual Abel Ogundokun Odeleye Foundation (AOOF) programme.

The AOOF, a non-profit organisation, which, since it took off in 2004, in honour of the man, who, apart from being a scholar, was also a community leader, writer and politician, has been growing by leaps and bounds.

In the last five years, hundreds of indigenes of Ilora (from where Dr. Odeleye hailed) and Afijio, for whom the scheme is generally meant, have benefitted from the

AOOF in various forms. While the foundation has reached out to some, through its community outreach health programme, others have benefitted from the scholarship awards.

Under the outreach health fairs programme, the AOOF carries out screening for terminal diseases like diabetes, hypertension, prostate, breast and cervical cancers, with the necessary medication offered thereafter. In some cases, referrals are granted for adequate treatment.

This year's programme was not particularly different from the previous years', except that the activities of the foundation drew the attention of more people willing to share in the vision for which the late Dr. Odeleye lived. What started as a modest 'family affair' five years ago has consistently seen people from within and outside Nigeria identifying with the cause, in form of donations, to better some other people's lot.

As her own contribution to the sustenance of the foundation, a young American girl, Maura Kruse, once donated her total proceeds from the sale of lemonade, amounting to \$22.65, while it has become an annual ritual for Christopher Adeleke Thomas, an Oyo-born New York-based stock analyst, to sponsor an award for a student of Mathematics at the tertiary level. During this year's AOOF Scholarship Awards Gala, held at Plaza de Aruna Hotel, Oyo, the award went to Miss Eynade Morohunmubo, a 300-Level student of Applied Mathematics at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso.

Apart from these, the authorities of Lead City University, Ibadan, instituted a five million naira scholarship two years ago, in the name of the AOOF. This is still intact, as it's not being accessed as yet. What is more, the foundation received a boost this year when the chairman on the occasion of the scholarship award, Engineer Anu Egbedayo, announced scholarship for students on an annual basis.

The AOOF has only been surviving on such goodwill, with which it has been able to, for example, fund the expansion of hospital facilities to accommodate new equipment; work with the Oyo State government to acquire new equipment for the General Hospital at Ilora and the like. Most recently, the AOOF constructed a block of classrooms at Onikoko Primary School, in place of the old dilapidated structure. The block of classrooms was built within three months.

While admonishing the AOOF scholars, chairman on the occasion, Mr. Egbedayo, charged them not to give in to challenges, as they are inevitable in life. "In life, there are challenges here and there, but there is a David in you. The wilderness experience is meant for everybody. When you meet a Goliath, please don't run away," he said.

The chairman buttressed his admonition with his own tough experience which he said he had had in life but refused to bow to. Mr. Egbedayo recalls his experience: "I have failed and failed several times. I failed several times so much so that the devil told me, 'you can't make it again, look at that river, jump into it and they won't find you again.'"

What is more, Chief Odeleye, in whose honour the foundation was instituted, had his own share of life's challenges. This much was revealed by the children of the late academic. According to the Executive Vice Chairman of the AOOF, Mr. Roland Olufemi Odeleye, "he came from the grass roots; Abel Ogundokun faced the same challenges you are facing today."

This personal experiences, perhaps, might be the reason the late Ilora chief left an instruction in his will that a foundation be instituted for the benefit of the people of his community to help assuage their challenges and to this cause, the children – Dr. (Mrs.) Titi Akinremi, Mr. Stephen Oladapo Odeleye, Mr. Roland Olufemi Odeleye, Dr. Bidemi Odeleye, Dr. (Mrs.) Opeoluwa Okunola and their siblings, wholly supported by their mother, Mama Elizabeth Wuraola Odeleye — have been religiously committed.

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