That Pastor Adeboye's commissioning of the upgraded UI Zoological Garden on January 14.

Can we imagine the University of Ibadan without its famous Zoological Garden? The rain disaster of August 2013 which ravaged the Garden remains a memorable date in the history of the important tourist facility. Happily, academic and recreational tourism do not exist in words in the University as the management and many wildlife lovers rose to support what is regarded as a "national treasure."

The extraordinary commitment of the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Isaac Folorunso Adewole to the revitalization of the facility is commendable. His personal monitoring of the project on a daily basis is a reference point as he ensured that contractors deliver services on the project to specification. The VC was so much active in the monitoring of the project and others on campus that there was nothing like delay in releasing project fund which might lead to delay in project execution, contract cost variation, contract splitting in order "to pull out money for the boys". Release of fund was tied to performance.

The Zoo, established in 1948 is designed primarily to support teaching and research in the Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science. As animal collection grew in number, it became a full fledged Zoo in 1974. It welcomes a large number of visitors, who are from all walks of life, from far and near every year. Apart from displaying animals for teaching, research and the entertainment of patrons, the Zoo is for the conservation of endangered species to save them from extinction. The Garden is home to a wide array of animals comprising mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians.
Most people wish for success, but only few realise that it only comes with a definite plan and a burning desire. The appointment of Dr. Olajumoke Morenikeji, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science of the University, on 20 September, 2010 as Director, is a study in passion and commitment to make the refreshing difference. Engaging and cheerful, record shows that in the history of the Garden, she has attracted more high networth individuals and corporate organizations to the Zoo for a life-long relationship. The effort has also focused on reclaiming the past glory of the recreational facility. Some of these individuals include the Governor of Oyo State, Senator Abiola Ajimobi, who recently paid a working visit to the Garden for on-the-spot assessment of the newly-improved Garden. The visit afforded him the opportunity to determine that both UI and his government were on the same page on functional and world-class tourist Centres in the State as he too was vigorously giving the moribund Agodi Gardens a facelift. He commended the management for a wonderful initiative. When former President Olusegun Obasanjo visited the University recently, he said "I must be in the Zoo as I had told Morenikeji that I would be there to see what she has done. Chief Obasanjo traversed the whole Garden and asked questions from the Director and other curators around. At the end of the visit, it was a commendation galore for the University on the national heritage from the versatile elder statesman.

Going by the account of the Director, Pastor E.A. Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God donated N5 Million Naira to the Zoo to actualize her dream in building an Educational Unit where children/adults will be given more information about animals existing within an outside the Zoo. On another visit to the Zoo by Pastor Adeboye, after the Director showed him the new architectural design made for the whole Zoo which included the building of modern cages, children Zoo, upgrading of facilities, sit-outs, walkways, playgrounds, and the intention of the Garden to acquire more animals, he donated another Twenty Million Naira. He donated yet another Twenty Million Naira when he visited one year after, as he was impressed with the level of development at the Garden.

The University also gratefully acknowledges the assistance from eminent Nigerians and companies on the development of the Garden as a lasting legacy. According to the Director, there are individuals who had contributed to the development of the Zoo, stating that “We have some other people who donated animals. Late Alhaji Arisekola Alao gave us a male lion called Arnold. Mr. Tony Daaboul gave another lion (Rocky),
Alhaji Boladale Idowu gave a dwarf crocodile, Mr. Kodi Ogbona gave a big baboon, ACP Egbeyemi gave two Patas monkeys and Mr. Adeniyi Oladeinde (Ladsom) gave 10 desktop computers for the new zoo library, among others. There was another person who came from another country. I spoke with him about the challenges, the things that were needed in the Zoo and the desire to upgrade it to international standards. He equally donated one thousand dollars.

Dr. Morenikeji further noted some companies had contributed. "The Coca-Cola Company gave us support when we wanted to start the Zoo buttery. The 7up Bottling Company helped in the painting of the Garden and also supported in setting up of the buttery. The Nigerian Brewery gave us feeds for our animals and they have continued to do that till now."

There are more than 50 species of birds, snakes and other animals in the Zoo where these animals are provided with natural world-related experiences. The teeming visitors to the Zoo are able to observe the animals in safety, and at leisure, they could observe to watch in their interesting habitat. In the Garden, monkeys have the largest number of species.

Situated on scores of acres of land, the UI Zoo is now fully transformed. The front view is now charming and welcoming to visitors. It is opened every day and shops at the premises have a wide variety of delicious take-aways and kiosks offering snacks. There are numerous picnic spots located within the Zoo where visitors can satisfactorily relax in the shade of giant trees. More cages have been built and the beautification of the river that flows through the garden has been completed. In place of the former bamboo bridge, there are two concrete bridges linking the two halves of the animal gardens. Ample and secure spaces are available for parking at the main entrance as security personnel are on duty for visitor’s convenience. Each room in the Zoo is well labelled in order to educate the visitors about animals.

Another defining moment in the life of the Zoo was the scary news on the outbreak of deadly Ebola virus in the country, last year. Through effective media hype, the Director was able to allay the fears of all categories of patron to the popular Garden that it was safe to visit. She stated that "our people are enlightened enough and well informed that our monkeys and chimpanzees are not infected with Ebola virus. This is
because they have not been out, they have been in enclosure and people don't touch the monkeys." In this regard, the Zoo continues to enjoy impressive patronage.

There are amazing testimonials from regular visitors to the Zoo. According to Bob Golding, the pioneer Director of the Zoo, "I have been amazed and indeed moved by what they had to say and to learn how the Zoo influenced their lives and careers." Indeed, George Fabricius captured this scenario more vividly when he wrote that "great achievements build a monument which shall endure until the sun grows cold." The Zoo is positively impacting humanity.

No serious organization can sustain itself on lean passions, which would die with the generation that espouses it. In this regard, one pays special tribute to the calibre of people who had managed the facility from 1948 till date. UI introduced the dimension of Zoo into recreation in Nigeria. The allocation of resources to its development by the current University management is commendable.

At 7.30am on Wednesday, 14 January, 2015 all roads will lead to the upgraded facility when a foremost benefactor of the Zoo, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) who has been gladly invited by the University will commission the project in the spirit of accountability. After all, the University is accountable to all its stakeholders.

An epochal event, the University community and all relevant stakeholders are looking forward eagerly to this ceremony. Definitely, It shall be a resounding success with treasured memories and blessings that hearts can know.

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