

Opening Address: History

WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY

Being the opening address at the official opening of the new National Secretariat and 14th Graduation ceremony of Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), Nigeria, in Calabar, Capital of Cross River State of Nigeria, on Saturday, August 21, 2010. By Bene E. Madunagu

The Co-chairpersons of this Occasion
Special Guest of Honour,
Other distinguished Guests of Honour,
Distinguished visitors,
Members of GPI Board of Trustees,
Parents,
Representatives of NGOs,
GPI Staff in the four GPI Centres (Calabar, Benin, Akwa Ibom and Uyo),
Past and present,
GPI Girls from the 4 Centres,
Graduating GPI Girls from the Four Centres
Our Media friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with deep appreciation that I welcome you all to this dual event of

the OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEW NATIONAL SECRETARIAT AND 14TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF GIRLS' POWER

INITIATIVE (GPI), NIGERIA today the 21st day of August 2010. We are also marking the 16th year of the birth of Girls' Power Initiative as an Institution

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***Bene Madunagu and Grace Osakue**

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having been established in 1993, but with regular programmes starting in July 1994.

The achievements of GPI in the last 16 years can be attributed to many factors. Permit me to single out some key ones.

1. The enabling socio-political environment through the approval, recognition and support by the Cross River State Government through the agency of the State

Butterfly Works, Netherlands.

3. The Commitment of GPI Board, Management, Staff and GPI Girls. I shall return shortly to this group of persons.

4. The support of the public, especially the communities where we are located.

5. The support of several individuals, including ideological friends who, through their faith in what GPI stands for have made



*Professor Bene Madunagu and Professor Miranda Dosunmu at the Exhibition.

Ministry of Education.

2. The financial and technical support, encouragement and trust by our partners, collaborators and funders since the commencement of our regular free weekly lessons for adolescent girls in July 1994. these partners include:

- The International Women's Health Coalition (IWCH), New York, USA
- The Ford Foundation, New York, USA, through the Office for West Africa, Lagos, Nigeria.
- The MacArthur Foundation, Chicago, USA, through their office for Africa in Abuja, Nigeria.
- Oxfam/Novib, Netherlands
- African Women Development Fund (AWDF), Accra, Ghana
- Empower, New York, USA
- One World UK (OWUK), London with technical support from

sacrifices to ensure that GPI remains not only alive, but on course, as they say.

6. And finally, the commitment, devotion, and faith of my husband who is also my comrade, partners, friend and mentor.

For me personally, the opening of this secretariat not just the building, but what the building embodies and symbolizes is partly a realization of a dream that dates back to the mid-1970s at the University of Lagos where my consciousness made a leap and my socio-political activities started. GPI which was established in 1993/94 is the third stage in my personal development as an activist. Each stage stands at the shoulders of its predecessor. For me, therefore, today's event is a celebration of a 35-year struggle.

This journey, has however, not been mine alone. It would never have been possible without the comradeship and partnership of Edwin Madunagu.

I congratulate the graduands of this 14th Graduation Ceremony of GPO, for their patience and commitment in staying through the 3-year period and for fulfilling all the requirements for graduation. As you move out into the larger society, your burden as a girl-child would continue but I am convinced that you have been equipped with the skills to overcome most of these difficulties. Furthermore, as you all know, although you cease from today to be regular weekly attendees of GPI lessons, you will be graduating today into the GPI Alumnae Association (GAA). The executive of GAA will today receive you into the alumnae Association. This is one solid continuous link with GPI. Beyond this, you are free to continue to utilize the counseling services of GPI as well as the GPI library. On the other hand, GAA can call upon you at any time to represent the association in any activities of GPI. I enjoin you all, as trained peer educators, to show good examples to your peers in any place you find yourselves. Congratulations and good luck in all your endeavours. My special thanks go to some key persons in the 16 years journey of GPI. They include my friend and co-founder of GPI, Mrs Grace Osakue. She is a living example in debunking the worthless belief that women are their worse enemies. Grace and I have origins in Edo and Akwa Ibom States. We do not speak the same language but we have worked as partners in the struggle for the rights of girls and women since 1986 and are still marching on. Thank you Grace. Prof. Eka Braide deserves the

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position she has occupied today in this ceremony, as the first Chairperson of the GPI Board of Trustees. She got retained in that position for three terms and still remains today, as a board member of GPI. Eka Bassey, was with me at the beginning of GPI and served over a decade in the organization, Assumpta Ekpenyong was the first National Programme Officer of GPI, Imoh Bernard Ekott and others who served GPI through the years before they moved on to other institutions, are all warmly acknowledged for their contributions to the growth and development of GPI. These women still associate with GPI even after their exit from the organization.

The present staff of GPI some of who have been in GPI over 10 years are real true assets and I truly acknowledge their untiring commitment and service to GPI. May I request all past and present GPI staff in this venue to please stand up to be recognized.

I invite you all to please take a tour around the premises. If you go in and out of the buildings constituting the GPI Village, you will observe that the project is far from being completed. The buildings are not finished. The necessary equipments for the training we offer to youths and teachers such as computers and necessities, video camera and accessories, tables and chairs for the classrooms, conference rooms and offices are only partially installed. It is even more obvious that the second floor of the classroom block and the last floor of the administrative block are crying for completion. We need your kind donations and support, in kind or in cash or both, to complete or advance the project.

As mentioned earlier, we have benefited immensely from the

generous support of our funders in the execution of our programs. With particular reference to the building of this National Secretariat of GPO, about 80% of the expenditure to bring these two buildings from the foundation to this present stage came from FORD FOUNDATION during the tenure of the present Ford Representative for West Africa, Dr. Adhiambo Odaga and when Dr. Babatunde Ahonsi was the Senior Program Officer directly in-charge of the Ford Foundation grant to GPI by the Foundation. We also received substantial funds for the building from the African Women Development Fund (AWDF).

I should be happy that I am leading an institution that has been of assistance in the positive development and empowerment of girls in their thousands in Nigeria to overcome many social, economic, political, religious, cultural and even institutional discriminatory norms and practices against the girl-child. Yet, I am pained that I am unable to offer the staff a level of remuneration commensurate with their commitment, hard-work, and selfless service in moulding these youths in and out of school to be useful to themselves, their families and the society at large. It has not also been possible to meet the need of institutional rewards such as pension scheme for the energies that staff spend in the development of this organization. Only through greater support from our collaborators, partners, colleagues, friends and the public at large shall we be able to rectify this painful inadequacy.

We had a donation of an 18-seater bus five years ago from Oxfam/Novib to assist us convey

girls home or near home when lessons close every Sunday as well as run administrative and other organizational errands. We acquired the bus when we had less than 250 girls registered to attend regular weekly lessons. Not only do we now have more than an average of 350 girls every Sunday afternoon, to cater for, the bus is getting too old and hence, every hard and expensive to maintain. Moving to this larger space to accommodate more girls that need GPI information would also mean that we need more facilitators, larger security outfit, etc, and therefore bigger budgets. It is my hope that everyone here present today will donate generously to help GPI meet her commitment to the quality information and education that we provide for the youths.

I acknowledge the builder, James Crentsil, the Architect, Emmanuel Etu, the Engineers, and all the workers and supervisors who helped to realize the project up to this stage. I thank the traditional rulers and the community leaders and neighbours who have warmly received us here.

Once more, I want to acknowledge the commitment, devotion, and faith of Edwin Madunagu, without whose devotion, the opening of this secretariat would not have been possible even in another year. He gave his total commitment, time, energy and full-time supervision, particularly in its final stages. Her Excellency, Mrs. Obioma Liyel Imoke, Hon. Commissioners here present, distinguished guests, I thank you all once again for your presence and the honour you have given GPI as demonstrated by your time, and commitment.

Bene Edwin Madunagu
Chairperson, GPI Executive Board. ■