LEGACY OF THE LATE PROF. GODWIN OLU PATRICK OBASI IN CHAMPIONING PAST AND PRESENT CLIMATE SERVICES PIONEERS IN AFRICA

By

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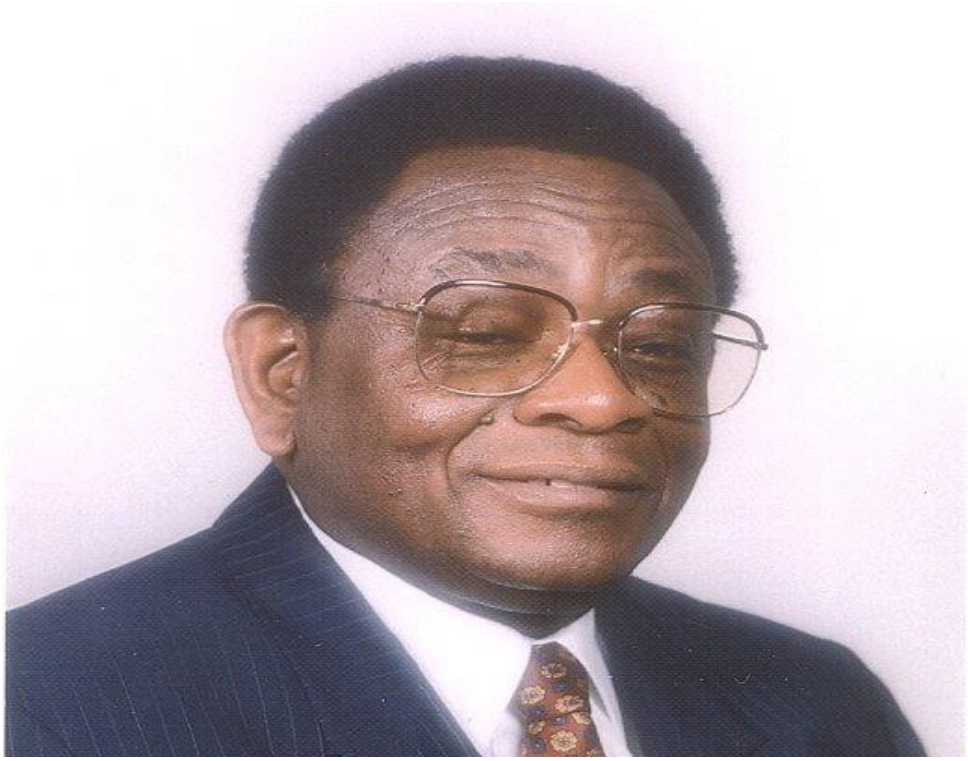


Prof. Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi

1. Background

The Sixth Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa (CCDA–VI) is being organized by African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). ACPC is an integral part of the Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDev-Africa) programme, which is a joint initiative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). The main objective of CCDA–VI is to address "The Paris Agreement on climate change: What next for Africa?" It will be held in Addis Ababa between 17-20 October 2016.

One hour of the CCDA–VI programme has been devoted to honouring of the late Prof. Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi for pioneering meteorological and hydrological services not only in Africa but the world over. During his 20 years tenure as the Secretary General of World Meteorological Organization (WMO), several global programmes were negotiated and implemented. These include the:

- Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol for the protection of ozone layer
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),
- World Climate Research Programme (WRCP)
- Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), among others.

In Africa, Prof Obasi was fundamental in the development and growth of the African National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHS), as well as many related institutions. His contributions to science and technology in Africa span beyond the fields of meteorology and hydrology. He was the Vice President of the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), and contributed to many global and regional scientific efforts such as the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), Academician of the International Academy of sciences of Nature and Society (ARMENIA), The International Council for Science (ICSU), among others.

The CCDA–VI programme session honouring Prof Obasi will be led by three discussants namely Prof. L.A. Ogallo, Dr. B.S. Nyenzi and Prof. F. Semazzi, all who were his students and colleagues. It is not possible to complete even a small fraction of Professor's Obasi's history and achievements in one hour session that has been allocated by the programme. Only some of the highlights will be provided based on inputs from former students, friends, and colleagues, especially those he interacted with, taught, mentored and worked with him at University of Nairobi (Kenya), in his country of Nigeria, at World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and among others.

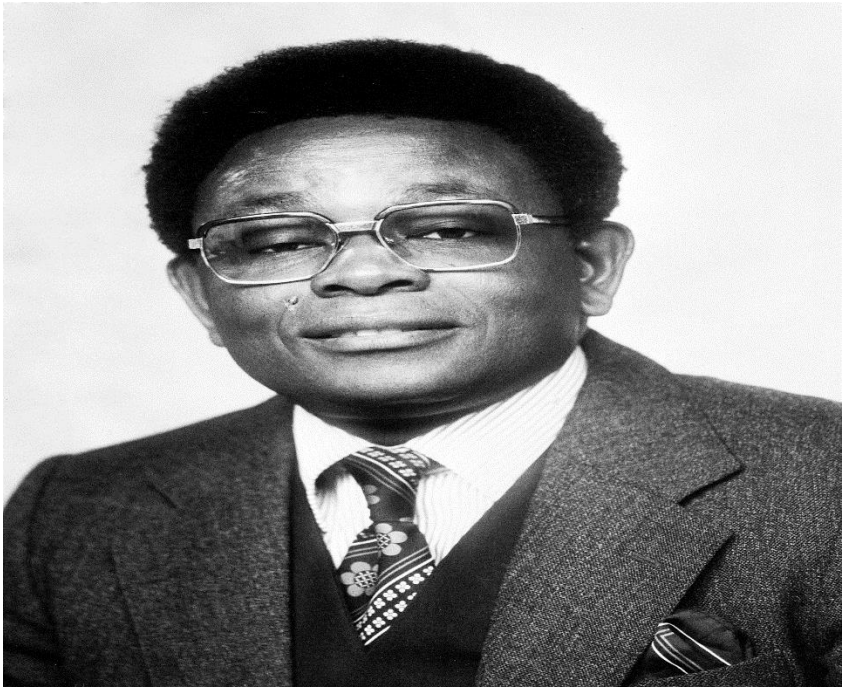
2. Birth and Family life

Professor Obasi was born in Ogori, Kogi State, Nigeria on 24 December 1933. He was the son of Mr. Albert B. Patrick Obasi and Winifred O. Akande. An ardent family man, he married Madam Winifred on 1 October 1976 and they were blessed with six children, namely Jane Abisola, Omowumi, Christine Folakemi, Albert Babatunde, Margaret Iyabo and Mary Omotayo Obasi. Professor Obasi died in Abuja, Nigeria on 3 March 2007, at the age of 73 years. R.I.P Prof. Obasi.

3. Education

Professor Obasi's early education life was in his country Nigeria, which included attending ST. Peter School, Ogori and St. Andrew School Okene, Kogi State and then moved to a Middle School Okene currently known as Abdul Aziz Attah Memorial College, Okene. He then moved to the prestigious Barewa College, Zaria, where he was classmate with the former Nigeria Head of State, general Yakubu Gowon. He proceeded for university studies in North America where his distinguished academic record included a Bachelor of Science (1959) with Honours from McGill University in Montreal, Canada and a Master of Science (1960) and Doctorate (1963) in Meteorology from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the USA. At MIT, he received the first Carl-Gustav Rosby Award for the best doctoral thesis of his graduating year.

Prof. Obasi during his early days while in Nairobi



4. Career

On his return to Nigeria, Professor Obasi joined the National Meteorological Service of Nigeria. He served the Nigerian Government in several capacities between 1963-67 including that of an Adviser to the Federal Government of Nigeria in meteorological research and training. He joined the University of East Africa (which became the University of Nairobi) in 1967. He joined the institution as a WMO Expert and Senior Lecturer. He was promoted to full professor of Meteorology in 1974.

He also served University of Nairobi as the Chairman of the Department of Meteorology and Dean of the Faculty of Science at the, Kenya. At the university, Professor Obasi not only taught meteorology to undergraduates and postgraduates, but also pioneered new research, and started innovative capacity building programmes for meteorology. He pioneered the beginning of B.Sc., M,Sc. and Ph.D. programmers in meteorology at University of Nairobi, which was at that time the major institution for undergraduate and graduate capacity building in Meteorology for most English speaking countries in Africa and beyond. Professor Obasi spent a lot of time motivating and encouraging young graduates to continue with further education. He developed some innovative collocation programmes between the university and north/ south cooperation for attachment of young graduates perusing post graduate programmers. The programme played fundamental roles in the replacement of expatriates experts at the department of meteorology and NMHSs by the locals. It also contributed immensely in the building of capacity in meteorological science in Africa and beyond. Most first directors of NMHSs and staff have been trained by the institution. In memory of his contributions at University of Nairobi, the university has introduced yearly students Award to the best final year B.Sc. student in Meteorology.

In 1978, he joined the WMO Secretariat as Director of Education and Training, where he continued to build capacities of the NMHSs and strengthen institutions for enhancing meteorological Education and Training in Africa and the rest of the world, especially in the developing nations. As Director of the Education and Training he endeavored at helping developing countries develop their human resources by training their staff and supporting development of regional training institutions. Prof. Obasi was a very intelligent, hardworking and ambitious man, someone with futuristic vision. Something he tried very hard to impact to his students and those staff who were working under him.

After serving WMO for 4 years as Director he fulfilled his ambition of becoming the Secretary General of WMO. In May 1983 he was elected Secretary-General of WMO by the 9th World Meteorological Organization Congress, with the then incumbent Secretary-General as his opponent which was a very risky situation. Professor Obasi was the first member of the Secretariat to be elected as WMO Secretary-General and the first African to be elected head of a UN body. He was re-elected for four terms again in 1987, 1991, 1995 and 1999 when three term limits of four years were introduced to serve as Secretary General of WMO. Upon completion of

his fifth term as Secretary-General of WMO, he was appointed Secretary-General Emeritus by the 14th World Meteorological Congress in 2003.

Prof. Obasi conducting a meeting during his early days as a WMO Secretary General

During his tenure as a Secretary General, Prof. Obasi was active in promoting global solutions to environmental issues, with special attention to the atmosphere, land, fresh water and the oceans. He was at the forefront in drawing the world's attention to several issues addressing climate risks challenges. Some of these include his contributions to among others:

- The Second UN Climate Conference was held on 29 October to 7 November 1990 that eventually led to the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). During his 20 years leadership WMO/UNEP coordinated Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) activities that produced four scientific reports in 1990, 1995, 2001, and 2007. The assessments proved beyond any doubt that climate change was real and had far reaching socio-economic consequences. IPCC assessments have provided fundamental science knowledge for UNFCCC and the related conference of parties' conferences (COPs). The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was shared between the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change,
- Established of Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) in 1992 to ensure that the observations and information needed to address climate-related issues are obtained and made available to all potential users.

- He worked hard to build links and partnerships with UN organizations and partners to development and promote vision of an Integrated World Geophysical organization supporting the goals of sustainable development. In this regards, he worked closely with his good friend Dr Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), to provide the scientific underpinning for the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer; as well as setting up of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Collaboration with other partners also led in the establishment of the development of other Global Observation systems including Global Terrestrial Observation System (GTOS); Global Oceans Observation System (GOOS); and Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), among others.
- Continued support to the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) that has been established to develop the fundamental scientific understanding of the physical climate system and climate processes needed to determine to what extent climate can be predicted and the extent of human influence on climate.
- Prof. Obasi was in 2005 given an award on the Protection of the Ozone Layer at the 20th Anniversary the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol. The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer objectives were for Conference of Parties to promote cooperation by means of systematic observations, research and information exchange on the effects of human activities on the ozone layer and to adopt legislative or administrative measures against activities likely to have adverse effects on the ozone layer.
- He contributed to the efforts that led to the negotiation and implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity, were identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. UNCCD goals are to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation, and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.
- Professor Obasi travelled widely championing the interests of WMO and as well as the important roles meteorological and hydrological knowledge in disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.
- He played an important role during the First World Conference on Natural Disasters in Yokohama, Japan in 1994, that adopted the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World. The First World Conference on Natural Disasters formed the foundation for the following Second and Third World Conferences on Disaster Reduction. The Second Disaster Reduction World Conference was held in Kobe, Japan in 2005, and initiated the Hyogo

Framework for Action (2005–2015) for Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction that was held in Sendai Japan in 2015 adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

- Within WMO programmes to strengthen capacities of the NMHSs were enhanced through many new efforts to support Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS) and contribute towards disaster risk reduction. Good examples is the operational Indian Ocean tsunami, establishment of the Climate Information and Prediction Services (CLIPS) within World Climate Applications and Services Programme (WCASP)project, regional climate centers, Regional Climate outlook forum, among others to help develop the capacity of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) to take advantage of the recent advances in climate science and to pass along the benefits to improve climate services with a user focus. Regional climate outlook forums are now formal operational reginal systems for regional integrated climate early systems, networked within international WMO frameworks and networks.
- El Niño is known to be linked to weather and climate extremes such as floods, drought, forest fires, among others. Prof Obasi worked with his UN counter parts for WMO to provide early warning leadership to El Niño challenges. UN inter agency task force under coordination of WMO continue to provide leadership on timely updates on El Niño and the related systems.
- Prof Obasi was always outward-looking in his administration and often consulted widely on issues related to the vision, development and management of WMO. A part from the traditional WMO systems, he often engaged and briefed diplomatic and other eminent persons on issues of interest to WMO. A good example was the forum for Eminent Persons Group in Geneva in 1996 to help map out a visionary future for WMO.
- He was also the person behind putting up the prestigious WMO building in Geneva in 1997 that has a structure of the great Titanic cruise ship.

The prestigious WMO modern building planned and constructed under Prof. Obasi management

WMO Secretary-General Professor Godwin O.P Obasi, Professor Bolin, Former Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC Michael Zammit Cutajar Robert Watson, IPCC Chair, and Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP

Prof. Obasi delivering a talk to a meeting session in the WMO Building Conference Hall (currently named after him as Salle Obasi)

His service to Africa and his fatherlands Nigeria, was enormous. Aside from his distinguished teaching career as university professor at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, he contributed to development of scientific institutions and policy through the African Academy of Sciences and the then Third World Academy of Sciences.

Prof Obasi was very disciplined, workaholic, had no time for idlers and rumormongers, believed on targeted outputs and outcomes, and operated WMO efficiently with strict work ethics. He believed in the staff welfare and capacity development. The staff members respected him greatly for this. Some of them however ended fearing him for his strict work ethics. To go and see Professor Obasi in his Office one needed to be very prepared with facts and be clear on issues being tabled for discussion, otherwise he could throw you out of his office.

5. Awards

Prof. Obasi was honoured by many professional meteorological and hydrological societies, academies of sciences and universities throughout the world. He was awarded university honorary degrees and honoured by several academies of sciences and governments. Professor Obasi received many honorary degrees awards worldwide including Doctor of Physics (honorary), University Bucharest, Romania, 1991; LLD (honorary), University Philippines, 1992; Doctor of Science (honorary), Federal University Tech., Akure, Nigeria, 1992; Doctor of Science (honorary), Alpine Geophysical Research Institute, Nal-Chik, Russian Federation, 1993; Doctor of Science (honorary), University Nairobi, Kenya, 1998. Outside his profession, he also received many medals for distinguished services and contribution to humankind, including award for Scientific/Technological Achievement in Environment given by the prestigious Zayed International Foundation for Environment in 2004.

6. Membership

Professor Obasi was a Vice-President of the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences and Academician of the International Academy of Sciences of Nature and Society (Armenia). Prof. Obasi has also been honored by other academies of sciences, by several universities as Doctor, Honoris Causa, and by governments world-wide. He is a Fellow and honorary member of many Meteorological and Hydrological Societies including Fellow Nigerian Meteorological Society ;Colombian Meteorological Society; Dominican Republic Meteorological Society; Association Hydrologists of India (honorary); Bulgarian Academy Sci. (Marin Drinov Badge of Honour, 2001) ;Ecuadorian Meteorological Society; Royal Meteorological Society ; African Meteorological Society (Gold Medal award 1993) ; Royal Statistical Society ; African Academy Sciences; Third World Academy Sciences; International Energy Foundation; Academician of the International Academy Sciences. Nature and Society (Armenian branch); Indian Meteorological Society (Citation and Gold Medallion, 2001, Citation Visakhapatnam

chapter, 2001); Kenya Meteorological Society (honorary); Hellenic Meteorological Society (honorary); British Institute Statisticians; American Meteorological Society; Cuban Meteorological Society (foreign); Burkina Faso Meteorological Society; Chinese Meteorological Society (honorary), Academy Agricultural and Forestry Sciences. Romania (honorary); among many others

7. Publications

Professor Obasi has published several scientific articles and has been Consulting Editor to many journals. He has authored and contributed to over 150 articles in professional journals.

8. Summary of Prof. Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi Contribution to the world and Africa

Professor Obasi was Secretary –General of the World Meteorological Organization for a period of 20 years from 1 January 1984 to 31 December 2003. He served for five consecutive terms. He was appointed WMO Secretary- General Emeritus after his retirement. He died in March 2007 at the age of aged 73. Those who worked with him highly respected him including his staff, students, scientists, meteorologists, diplomats, friends and family members. To many of his peers, he was known as "GOP" (Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi), to several of his staff, he was known as "SG" (Secretary General) , while his close called him as "Oga " (the Big Boss). Obasi was a very honest man, and man of honour, who feared nothing except God. He was a great man and amazing achiever who devoted his entire life to meteorological sciences.

Professor Obasi contributed widely to the development of the science and application of meteorology for socio-economic development in Africa. This extended from his days as an employee of the Federal Government of Nigeria, his leadership at University of Nairobi in establishing new meteorological institution that provided undergraduate and post graduate degrees for enhancing African wide training and education in meteorology science. Many meteorologists in Africa were mentored Prof Obasi between 1963 to the time of his death in 2007. Throughout his life at WMO he had special focus on education and training and capacity building for the NMHSs of developing countries. In order to enhance applications of meteorological science to reduce climate related risks in socio-economic development. He initiated the establishment of several regional climate centres in Africa including the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development in Niamey, Niger; the Drought Monitoring Centres in Nairobi, Kenya and Harare, Zimbabwe. The two centers are now known as IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC), and SADC Climate Services Centre now based in Gaborone.

As secretary General of WMO, he built many links and partnerships for reduction of environment degradation, climate change and impacts of disasters in supporting the goals of sustainable development as witnessed in UNFCCC. UNCCD, Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, establishment of IPCC, enhanced global observation systems, enhanced application

of climate information and services, among others. He engineered the construction of the new WMO Headquarters building in Geneva, a landmark that will stand for ever publicly demonstrating his visible legacy of his WMO career.

Climate change has massive implications for African development. Prof Obasi inspired high level sensitization of the climate related risks in Africa. The efforts have for example led to Africa Union Commission (AUC) setting up a Committee of Heads of African States on Climate Change (CAHOSCC). African Ministerial Committee on Meteorology (AMCOMET) has also been set up to coordinate African climate responses in different sectors and engender African collaboration in the global climate governance.

A part from meteorology, Prof Obasi also contributed and supported the development of other sciences, scientific institutions and relevant policies as is portrayed through his personal involvement in the activities of the African Academy of Sciences , the then Third World Academy of Science among others. No meteorologist in history of Africa has done more to promote the role and influence of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of the developing countries. His contributions to environment degradation, climate change issues, Meteorology and related applications for disaster risk reduction in support of sustainable development will continue to stand recognized by the current and future generations in Africa and beyond.

Prof. Obasi delivering a speech at one of the inter agency UN meetings