

¹Africa as the Cradle of Biomedical Engineering III

There was a mixed grill across the continent in the formation of both national and continental societies in biomedical engineering. For instance, while in South Africa biomedical education and training preceded professional society formation, in Nigeria, it is the professional society that preceded the biomedical education and training. This later scenario is still observed in recent times, for in some countries without an educational institution, they already have a professional society in biomedical engineering.

The earliest recorded national biomedical engineering society in Africa was found in Nigeria in the early 1970s. This was the then Nigerian Association of Health Engineering (NAHE) based in the Department of Biomedical Engineering, College of Medicine, University of Lagos. NAHE conducted a number of seminars and conferences in biomedical engineering and published a quarterly journal called NAHE (Nigerian Association of Health Engineering). Their first annual conference held in 1974. However, NAHE later got moribund and in the early 1990s came the short-lived National Association of Biomedical Engineers and Technicians (NABET).

Finally, in 1999, the up and standing Nigerian Institute for Biomedical Engineering (NIBE) was established to evolve standard and enduring biomedical engineering training and practice in Nigeria. In 2003, NIBE was registered with the International Federation for Medical and Biological Engineering (IFMBE) to represent Nigerian biomedical engineering professionals. Then in 2010, NIBE established both a membership association (Association of Biomedical Engineers and Technologists of Nigeria, NABET) and a training college (College of Biomedical Engineering and Technology, CBET).

In 1978, South Africa, the Biomedical Engineering Society of South Africa (BESSA) was formed to take care of biomedical engineering professionals in South Africa. BESSA had joined the IFMBE long before Nigerian NIBE joined. Both BESSA and NIBE were the only biomedical engineering societies from Africa in IFMBE until 2017.

Concerted effort to evolve a pan African Biomedical Engineering Society started in the year 1994, when the African Federation for Technology in Healthcare (AFTH) was launched by the support of the GTZ. AFTH had a constitution and byelaws and a formal Council. Membership was composed of individual and national societies. AFTH had meetings sponsored by

GTZ and had a five-year report (1994-1999) of its activities prepared for GTZ in which it stated some of the programs it had hosted and co-hosted. This spanned 1994 to 1999 and included regional workshops, trainings, symposia, international summit etc. However, nothing was heard about AFTH again till date.

In 2003, the Nigerian NIBE led by Dr Kenneth I. Nkuma-Udah spearheaded the formation of the African Union of Biomedical Engineering and Sciences (AUBES) in Ghana while some of its members were on a Medical Equipment Training with other African biomedical engineering professionals. AUBES was established in order to integrate the effort of various biomedical engineering professionals and to expand cooperation on a continental basis.

Since 2003, NIBE has made effort to pioneer the development of biomedical engineering in Africa. AUBES had a Working Committee and its official inauguration / 1st African Biomedical Conference scheduled to hold in 2005 in Nigeria was cancelled for logistic reasons. A journal which NIBE had established – African journal of Medical Physics, Biomedical Engineering and Sciences – to sustain the union was eventually taken up and adopted by the College of Biomedical Engineering and Technology, an arm of the Nigeria NIBE as AUBES got moribund.

The last stroke in the effort of NIBE Nigeria to evolve a pan-African biomedical engineering organization happened in 2016, when she hosted the 1st African Biomedical Conference (AFROBIOMEDIC 2016) in Abuja, Nigeria. Although, AFROBIOMEDIC 2016 did not achieve its maximum potential for paucity of funds, it sure excited a stimulus in IFMBE to propose and establish a Working Group on African Affairs, WGAA. African biomedical engineering professionals in every country are expected to leverage on the opportunity provided by WGAA to organize their national and eventually their regional biomedical engineering societies.

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