



TRIBUTE TO PROF. HERBERT CHIDOZIE UZOEGBO



In the early hours of the 27th December 2018, the scientific community has lost a great and inspiring personality when Professor Herbert Chidozie Uzoegbo passed away. Those who were blessed to walk with him for some time, will understand the great loss this means, as we have lost a unique personality, a great teacher and inspirer, and a wonderful friend. For me Herbert Uzoegbo was always a source of wisdom, justice, absolute trust and impartiality. While he was a hard-working and precisely thinking personality, he never lost his humour and sense of seeing the world as a joyful place.

Prof. Uzoegbo passed away in his residence in Northcliff after three years of illness. In June 2015 there were medical complications after he was delivered to hospital. Only one week before I had the great luck to meet him still in healthy conditions in Dar es Salaam, when he attended the first KEYS student conference as keynote speaker. During the workshops we organised, those students that were lucky to be mentored by him, do still remember his power and wisdom today. He never showed any pretentiousness when he worked with students. There is such a low

number of professors that sees working with students as a mutual learning process, Prof. Uzoegbo was one of them. With this kindness and wisdom, he definitively coined the careers of a high number of students and assisting researchers.

Prof. Uzoegbo was born in 1954 in Lagos Nigeria and held Nigerian and South African citizenships. He worked as professor in Structural Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. He obtained the Dipl. Ing. degree at the University of Bucharest in Romania, after which he worked for a construction company in Port-Harcourt in Nigeria. Later he obtained a Master degree from the Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine at the University of London. For his PhD degree he went to the King's College University of London. Between 1984 and 1985, and 1990 and 1992 he worked as a lecturer at the Enugu State University of Technology. After that he went to the University of Zimbabwe as a lecturer in structural engineering. Since 1995 he worked at the University of the Witwatersrand. The list of students he supervised during his



career as well as the number of publications is long.

He was Fellow of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering, registered Professional Engineer of the Engineering Council of South Africa, and Fellow of the International Masonry Society. He was member of numerous professional bodies in South Africa and the UK. Over the course of his career, he obtained various awards for his research excellence. Among others he was awarded the Nigeria Achiever Award in 2009 by the Nigeria Vice President at the Nigeria High Commission for achievements in Engineering.

He always told me that in Africa it is important to be a generalist, and therefore he taught a great variety of courses in materials and structural behaviour and he was involved in multiple research and professional activities related to materials and structures. The breadth of his knowledge was remarkable, and I cannot remember a single situation in which his advice did not help to proceed further. Since he was travelling a lot, he was well known by international researchers, and he was always a most welcome person everywhere, for everyone adored his warm heart, wealth of wisdom and knowledge.

I met Prof. Uzoegbo for the first time in 2009 in the context of a research project, which was stuck in a difficult situation. Prof. Uzoegbo entered the project as a moderator, and I am absolutely sure that no other person, but Herbert Uzoegbo, could have solved the situation. Since we met for the first time, there has always been an invisible band of friendship and highest respect between us; professionally and privately. Over the course of the years, we always managed to keep it alive across the cultures and continents, thus,

creating a remarkable output of joint projects, where we were involved jointly and with sustainable impact, such as SPIN, PACE-PTS, and LightSHIP. In 2013 we brought the first international conference on Advances in Cement and Concrete Technology in Africa into life, which was repeated in 2016 and will sustain in the future. Unfortunately, already in 2016 he could no longer be involved due to his illness, but we started it as a team.

Any other scientific or educational project I have done since then has been coined continuously by my friend Herbert, as his unpretentious, ungrudging, unbiased, respectful, wise and humorous role model is such an inspiration. It was always a pleasure to meet Herbert for work and privately. Both ways, one could always learn so much from him, in research and in life. And he never lost his humour. Even when I visited him in Johannesburg after his illness started and it was hard for him to express himself very clearly, he never lost his humour. And despite his unfortunate situation, he was always keen on getting informed what his students and research colleagues did. He liked to see talents grow, ungrudging and from the bottom of his heart; and most who came across him definitively grew, due to his outstanding personality and inspiration.

Therefore, despite the mourning about his death and the huge void he leaves in the scientific and engineering community, his memory will definitively sustain in the generations of inspired engineers and researchers he raised.

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