

(Professor Iji Walks On Top in the Research Field in Fiji)

Inside Story



Fiji National University Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, Professor Paul Iji.

Professor Iji Walks on Top in the Research Field in Fiji

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By PRAVIN NARAIN

PROFESSOR Paul Iji, a distinguished scholar with expertise in animal science and a background in agriculture, has been recognised as the leading researcher in Animal Science and Veterinary Science in the world. This achievement cements Professor Iji's position as a preminent figure in the field.

Background

Professor Iji, a man whose heart beats in rhythm with the fertile soil, has found a second home in Fiji, where he was the Dean of the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) at Fiji National University (FNU). But his connection to agriculture stretches far back, rooted in the rich farmlands of his native Nigeria.

Born in central Nigeria, a region aptly named the Middlebelt for its geographical bridge between the country's north and south, Professor Iji describes his home state of Benue as the "Food Basket of Nigeria." Much like Fiji, Benue's tropical conditions allow a cornucopia of crops to thrive, from yams and cassava to rice, sorghum, sweet potatoes, and a vibrant tapestry of beans. This agricultural abundance wasn't just a national resource; it was Professor Iji's childhood reality.

"My father was the Village Headman, similar to a Fijian Turaga-ni-Koro. He led a large farming operation, and my elder brother now carries on that legacy as Chief. We worked incredibly hard but not necessarily smart. There had to be a better way. This realisation, this quiet seed of potential, blossomed into a determination to pursue agricultural studies, a path that would benefit not only his family but his entire community," he said.

Education

Professor Iji's impressive career in academia began in 1987, following a successful stint teaching agriculture and

biology at the secondary level. Since obtaining his Bachelor's degree, he has embarked on a remarkable journey that has seen him hold prestigious positions across four countries: Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, and now Fiji.

His dedication and expertise have propelled him through the ranks, culminating in his appointment as a full professor in 2014 at the University of New England in Australia.

Professor Iji's experience is a tapestry woven from teaching to research coordination, and leadership roles as Dean and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. Currently, his focus lies on providing strategic direction in research endeavours.

"My undergraduate studies in Nigeria culminated in a first-class honours degree in Animal Sciences. Achieving the distinction of top graduate presented an exciting opportunity – the university planned to retain me and nurture my potential as an academic. However, fate intervened during this pivotal moment. The external examiner, a professor from a different university, was highly impressed and offered me a position at his own institution, the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, one of Nigeria's oldest and most established universities," he said.

"I began my Master's programme in Nigeria, but an opportunity arose to pursue another Master's degree at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. This pattern repeated itself with my doctoral studies. I commenced my PhD in Nigeria but ultimately secured a scholarship to complete another PhD at the University of Adelaide in Australia.

"These enriching experiences equipped me with a remarkably broad and multifaceted perspective. My expertise encompasses both tropical and temperate agriculture, and I have delved deeply into multiple sub-disciplines of agriculture at

the postgraduate level."

Research Ranking

Professor Iji's relentless pursuit of knowledge and dedication to research have garnered him an impressive accolade. For more than four years now, Professor Iji has been listed among the top two percent of the world's most impactful researchers. This year, Research.com, a respected platform, recognised him as the top researcher in Fiji and a remarkable 1156th globally within the field of Animal Science and Veterinary Science.

"This recognition is a humbling honour not just for myself but especially because it places FNU on the map as my research base. It fills me with optimism that FNU's researchers will continue to excel, propelling us towards becoming a renowned centre for research across various key disciplines," Professor Iji shared.

"This recognition serves as a powerful message to prospective students and scientists. It signifies that our research efforts are led by a world-class researcher, ensuring rigorous research processes. Anyone seeking to study or collaborate with us can expect exceptional mentorship and dedicated attention."

"This is merely the beginning. I believe this recognition will inspire both students and colleagues to strive even harder, propelling FNU to achieve greater heights. FNU boasts a remarkable pool of dedicated early-career researchers across various colleges. I urge them to rise to the challenge and contribute to our collective success."

Future Plans

"While I am honoured personally, it's even more significant because it places FNU in the spotlight as my research institution. This achievement fills me with immense optimism for the future of FNU's research community. I have no doubt that

our researchers will continue to flourish, solidifying FNU's reputation as a leading centre for research across various key disciplines," he said.

"This achievement serves as a powerful magnet for prospective students and researchers. It signifies that FNU's research is led by a world-class scholar, guaranteeing rigorous research processes. Anyone choosing to study or collaborate with us can expect exceptional mentorship and unwavering support."

Message to Students

Professor Iji, a leading researcher and advocate for fostering a collaborative research environment, encouraged students to pursue advanced education and broaden their horizons. He further stressed the importance of knowledge sharing within the research community.

"Researchers are encouraged to engage in a more open exchange. This extends beyond the sharing of research equipment; the dissemination of valuable information can significantly benefit colleagues. Collaborative endeavours are the cornerstone of elevating research as a whole," he said.

"We possess expertise in distinct areas, and by uniting these strengths, we can achieve far greater effectiveness. This collaborative spirit extends to student supervision as well.

"Supervisors can learn from each other's experiences and approaches. Openly sharing knowledge and resources is not a sign of weakness but a testament to collective strength. Isolated research efforts have limitations; some projects necessitate the combined efforts of hundreds of researchers. Without collaboration, such groundbreaking work simply cannot be achieved."