



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MINING,
METALLURGICAL, AND PETROLEUM ENGINEERS

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Egbert Imomoh: An Unstoppable Passion and Success as a Petroleum Engineer: A Life with No Regrets

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Egbert Imomoh conducted by Oghogho Effiom on October 2, 2022. This interview is part of the AIME and its Member Societies: AIST, SME, SPE, and TMS Oral History Project.

ABSTRACT

Growing up in northern Nigeria, Egbert Imomoh was a born engineer. Always interested in figuring out how things worked, he excelled in his practical math and physics courses at school. Despite his father's wishes for Imomoh to become a doctor and Imomoh's own wishes to pursue a life in beer brewing, he could not deny that becoming an engineer was his true calling. After being offered an engineering scholarship by Shell, Imomoh officially joined the company in 1968 as a petroleum engineer. He then embarked on a thirty-seven-year engineering career, eventually making the transition from technical positions to management. As an operations manager and petroleum engineer, Imomoh found many opportunities to learn about both the technical and social sides of the industry. Using that knowledge, he helped found Afren, and became an irreplaceable member of SPE, eventually becoming the organization's first African president in 2013. It was Imomoh's quick thinking and entrepreneurial skills that brought him opportunities for advancement in the industry, but it was his devotion to upholding his values and morals that established him as a true-blue engineer and brought him the great success he has today. Hear about his extraordinary life and achievements in his oral history.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

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00:14 Introduction

Effiom:

This is Oghogho Effiom; I'm the regional director for Africa, the Society of Petroleum Engineers. We're at the SPE's Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition in Houston, Texas, on the 2nd of October 2022, with Egbert Imomoh, who was the first African to lead the Society of Petroleum Engineers as president in 2013. Egbert was chairman of Afren Energy Resources, but I got to know him when he was Deputy Managing Director of Shell in Nigeria and later again as SPE president. I'm proud to call him a mentor and a leader. This recording is a part of AIME's oral history capture program.

00:58 Beer Brewing Aspirations and My Early Education in Nigeria

Effiom:

So, Egbert, tell me where you grew up and how you grew up.

Imomoh:

I grew up in Zaria. I was born in Zaria in the northern part of Nigeria. My father was working in the Nigerian railways, and I went to my primary school in Zaria, which was a Catholic school. After that, I went to secondary school in Kaduna, also a Catholic school. In those days, if you were a Catholic, you went to those Catholic schools, and St. John's College, Kaduna, was the top secondary school, then, in the northern part of the country. To go to the University of Nigeria, you have to do A levels. So, I decided to go to the east, to Enugu, a school called College of Immaculate Conception, where I did my A Levels. I did two years there, got my A Levels, and at the end of it, I was wondering what to do with myself. In those days, the school curriculum and university curriculum ran differently. The secondary school ran from January to December, and the universities ran from September to August. So, when you finish your A Levels, you had to go and get a job as a teacher or in an industry. Now, I didn't want to teach because I thought I would be a lousy teacher. As a matter of fact, I wanted to go and work in a brewery because I had a friend who was working in the brewery, and he told me the best beer you could drink was the one you drew from the vats. I said, "That's where I want to go and work." Well, as God will have it, Shell, at that time, started thinking of its Nigerianization policy. Shell went around the country to various schools identifying potential students whom they could offer scholarships to study either engineering or geology. So, they came to our school and identified two of us, who were then offered a sort of pre-scholarship work in Port Harcourt. I ended up working for Shell in Port Harcourt as a pre-scholarship student. That was my early introduction into the oil and gas industry.

03:34 A Born Engineer

Effiom:

Was that the influence to study engineering?

Imomoh:

No, father died when I was 14, and my mother sort of brought us up. They said I always fiddling with things. Whether there was a broken radio, a watch that was broken, anything that was broken, I thought

I could fix. That sort of messing around sort of put it in my mind that I could do some engineering. But also found mathematics and physics very easy; that was my attraction to that course of study. To study physics and mathematics and then to go into engineering.

Effiom:

What about your professors? Did they have an influence, or did classmates influence you in your studies?

Imomoh:

No, as a matter of fact, my father wanted me to be a doctor. If he was alive, I would have been forced to study medicine. Well, I tell you what happened. In those days, to do biology laboratory practical study, you had to go out into the fields to go and hunt for frogs. You got the frogs, and you did dissections. And I said, "What am I doing messing around with these frogs?" Eventually, that killed my interest in medicine. In that way, I had to fashion what I wanted to do in my life because my mother hadn't had any formal education. So, I myself had to think through what it was I wanted to do and decide that I was going to do engineering and study maths, study physics, and chemistry, but not biology.

05:15 Staying Productive During the Nigerian Civil War

Effiom:

There's a war going on in some parts of the world now. There have also been sociopolitical events, and we are heavily influenced by activities happening in the society in general. On top of that, there is the climate change concern with all the initiatives to mitigate climate change that have some impact on how we live today. What political or cultural events affected your studies at that time?

Imomoh:

When I was in university, Nigeria went through a civil war. I studied at the University of Birmingham. So, I was not in the country when the war started. I mentioned earlier that my mother and my brothers and sisters were in Northern Nigeria (Zaria) when the conflict started. They had to relocate from Zaria to our village, which was in now Edo state. They had to leave Zaria and leave everything behind while I remained outside the country. I was a student in the UK when the Nigerian Civil War broke out. But then I came back before the war ended. 1968. I came back, and I was working in Warri during the conflicts and actually went through some of the issues of civil war. There was a Swedish called Count Van Rosel, and one of the things he wanted to do was to stop oil activities in the western region because, although the conflicts were in the East, those other posts in the West were still working, drilling, and producing. His strategy was to throw some explosives to the rigs to stifle our activities. We had to restructure our work so that we used the knowledge that this small aircraft could only fly during certain hours, which meant we could only perform our rig activities outside those hours. So, when we suspected that he was going to come and attack the rigs, everything was shut down, and we went into the villages to take refuge. We kept ourselves busy during the war, and that kept us away from the conflict.

07:34 Beginning a Career With Shell as a Well-Site Engineer

Effiom:

I've heard from students who've had to change universities mid-course because of recent geopolitical conflicts. This probably has been happening for some time, and these are the realities that we have to face from time to time. My next question is about your early foray into the industry. I think you've talked a little bit about it already. But tell me about your first job. What were you doing, and what challenges did you face?

Imomoh:

Okay, let's go back. I started as a mechanical engineer at the university. Shell then ran a training program in Holland. It was a five-month intensive program where they converted us, those who were mechanical engineers, to petroleum engineers. So, we did reservoir engineering, petrophysics, mixing mud, and drilling activities. I did that from July 1968 to the end of 1968. When I then went back to Nigeria, the job was called a well-site petroleum engineer. And indeed, you were supposed to be very responsible for making sure the mud was in good shape. You did all the penetration logs, supervised all the logging activities, ran all the casing, and all of that. The shifts I had was 12 days onsite with four days off. I really felt responsible. But I tell you, one thing that struck me was this training we had in Holland. There was a little laboratory where we mixed mud, and then I was tossed to the rig and told I was responsible for mixing mud. I said, "Where's the mud?" I went from mixing mud in little cups in the lab to being responsible for mixing mud in huge tanks. I asked myself, "Am I responsible for that?" Indeed, that was my job. Can you imagine translating what you learned, mixing the little chemicals in a little cup, to now responsible for this huge tank mixing mud for drilling? I enjoyed it because I was responsible. Shell had a way of making you responsible. They gave you a job, you were responsible for executing it, and there are no two ways about it. But I also learned that you must have some flexibility of mind to learn from those who knew better than you do. We didn't have much training on how to prepare a penetration log. We took how much time the bit took to penetrate, and then you plotted it on paper, and that gave you an idea of whether you're going through shale or sand and all of that. Of course, I'd never done this before in my life. So, I looked around and I asked the radio operator, "Can you teach me how to do this?" A penetration curve, and he said "That's not my job." His job is the radio operations. I wondered who is going to teach me this job? Fortunately for me, one of the senior well-site petroleum engineers came along and taught me how to do it. So, I learned. What this taught me was you have to have the flexibility of mind to learn from anybody who can teach you. You've got to face challenges and be able to scale up if you can see a way for whatever you learn, from a small Mickey Mouse laboratory mud mixed to mixing mud in a tank. So, that was some of the early challenges.

11:13 A Valued Mentor – Aret Adams

Effiom:

Fantastic. That's a good segue into my next question, which is about your sponsors or your mentors. Who were those that really helped to identify your talent or help you cover those gaps as you rose through the ranks?

Imomoh:

Well, fortunately, before I left to study in the UK, I met a gentleman by the name of Aret Adams. You probably heard of him; he eventually became the Managing Director of NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Company), and we came from the same part of the country. I looked at him as a mentor.

When I came back to the country, he had already moved up a little bit in Shell. He took me under his umbrella, taught me the dos and don'ts of the industry. Luckily, it's not just the work ethics he taught me, but the ethical way of doing things. He said, "Look, Egbert, we're quite proud to be petroleum engineers in the industry; don't mess around with this, don't mess around with that." And those little snippets have stayed with me for a long, long time. What you should do and should not do. And it hasn't done me any harm over the time.

Aret had a fantastic, fantastic sense of humor. Fantastic sense of humor. It's never a dull moment with him. He was not a very tall man, but very full of activity, full of movements, and full of life. But the main thing was a great sense of humor, very good and committed, very dedicated person.

13:01 My First Taste of Responsibility – Working as an Operations Engineer for Shell

Effiom:

Let's talk a little bit about your experience within Shell. You held many technical positions, you worked in Shell for 37 years, and you rose through the ranks. Which role would you say was the most rewarding or had the most impact on propelling you forward?

Imomoh:

The very first time when I left the well site, after 18 months, I got fed up with fieldwork. I told my supervisor, look, "I don't want to do this job anymore. I'm not learning anything new. After 18 months here, I want to move." So, they gave me a job of an operations engineer. As an operations engineer, you're actually running the activities of a number of rigs. You do the programming; you do this ordering of materials to supervising everything that goes on that rig. Boy, it stretched me. It's not like now, where you use all these tools to communicate to remote areas. I had a hand radio. the rigs would call you any time of day or night. I would then leave where I was staying and go to the office, take the call, go back to my little flat, have as much sleep as I could, and then get back to the office in the morning to actually record by radio what had happened in those rigs overnight, like a daily broadcast. That daily broadcast then formed the basis of operational reports. It was tough, I can tell you. As a young man, I didn't have much freedom. I couldn't do things my fellow young men were doing. It stretched me quite a bit, but I enjoyed it because it was my first job of responsibility. Looking after the rigs, looking also after people who were then well-site engineers reporting to me directly. I also had immediate contact with my bosses because of this daily drilling report that I had to give.

Effiom:

It gave you early exposure and visibility to senior leaders.

Imomoh:

That's true.

15:19 Moving Into Management

Effiom:

That was quite early. Okay. I can see why that would have a good impact. When I looked at your background, you spent a number of years in the petroleum engineering discipline, and you eventually became the petroleum engineering manager, then you moved to being a divisional manager. So, I became curious to find out from you what helped you switch from being a purely technical leader to being one that had more managerial skills and more strategic skills.

Imomoh:

I didn't have a choice. I was thrown in the deep end. I had to learn to swim very, very quickly. My very nature was not one of socializing. Divisional manager jobs in those days, there was a lot of external work that went with it. And my nature was purely technical. What's the problem? How do you solve it? So, I didn't have much of what I call the social contacts, dealing with communities, dealing with contractors. I never really had any interest in that. But something came up, and some movements that didn't materialize, and I then got a call saying, "Hey, you're going back to Port Harcourt to become a divisional manager." And so, I did. The transition was not easy, but then had to learn. And sometimes, what is not natural to you, you struggle with it. But a few things helped me, which I think became very, very important. I played squash; I played golf, and I played hockey, which meant that I had the opportunity to learn, interact with different people, and then create a relationship outside the technical area. So, I think those things helped. Also, I was very lucky that my wife, who had studied English and French, didn't do any work outside the home because in those divisional jobs, there's a lot of high social interaction with people, and my wife actually played a very, very important role in that job. She eventually didn't have a career of her own, but that helped us a lot to then handle both the technical and social community type job that comes with the division manager's role. Eventually, I found it exciting because I met some of my best friends doing that job. Some very deep friendships that has lasted for a long time.

18:14 Exciting Opportunities Post-Retirement

Effiom:

You obviously were really busy, and then you had a lot of experience, and you just talked about even not just a technical but even a social calendar that you had to manage. And you did that for many years. But at some point, you began to conceive of the idea to found Afren. Afren is a Pan-African independent oil and gas company which you founded. And I know that there are a few people who might be listening here that might want to do something similar. So, what steps would you advise a young petroleum engineer who has dreams of owning his or her own company?

Imomoh:

Point of correction. When I left the divisional job, I then took on the job as a deputy managing director of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC).

Which I did for five years. I retired on that job. Then Shell gave me a two-year contract working in London. If you remember, in those days, that was the height of the Ogoni Niger Delta crisis. SPDC had a very small office in London of fairly experienced people who could then take the Shell story to anywhere in the world. I went to the British Parliament and went to the US Senate. I spoke to NGOs, so people who knew the country and knew what the issues were. That's the job I was doing in London. I did that job till November 2004. That was when I was approached to join Afren. I had retired from Shell then. So, that came as a post-retirement job, which was quite exciting. So, the idea there with Afren was started

because there were a lot of undeveloped assets, small assets. The idea was we would take one of these or two of these, apply technology, apply capital to it, and then bring production to life. That's how Afren started; this was after my retirement from Shell. Not while I was with Shell.

20:28 “When You Have the Courage, Strike Out” – Advice for Entrepreneurs

Effiom:

But things have changed. There are younger and younger people who want to work for, let's say 10 years, 15 years, and they want to start up their own companies, even oil companies. Given all your experience, what would you advise?

Imomoh:

Well, to tell you frankly, knowing what I know now, I would probably have started a small company earlier. Why do I say so? It can make a lot of difference to you if you succeed. But if you fail, as well, it can also make a lot of difference. As a Shell director, I had a lot of people working for me. If I had a legal issue, I had a legal department, I had a finance department, I have a HR department, a planning department. Now, when you form a small company, you are the legal person, you are the finance person, you're sort of everything, and that actually broadens your knowledge, broadens your exposures, and broadens the impact you can have of what you are doing. You can see very, very quickly your influence on the bottom line. If you're in a large organization, I used to joke that some of the communities had more impact on the bottom line because they can go stopping wells. This was more than I could do as a deputy managing director. So, it's a completely different ballgame. Now, the advantage, I will say, that people want to jump ship. Watch when you jump ship because when you jump ship, you may not know how deep that water is, and you don't know whether you should have gone in with a life jacket or not. I mean that the experience which I garnered working from Shell, all the training, all the exposure on all of that, of course, plays a big role. Because I've seen some people who never had that experience struggling. To my experience, get as much experience as you can on the majors, get some solid training, solid exposure. And then, if you wish, when you have the courage, strike out because if you succeed, it can make you a very, very successful person.

Effiom:

Thank you. That's really good.

23:09 Dinner VS. Supper – Schooling and Life in the UK

Effiom:

What was your experience like schooling in the UK, especially having to leave Nigeria and leave your mom, who was by that time a widow?

Imomoh:

It was a fascinating experience. I mean, Shell organized everything. We landed in London, and we had to go to a school of how to eat with proper cutlery, I mean, knife and spoon on your right side, fork on your left side — just to make sure we didn't make a fool of ourselves eating. I then went to Birmingham.

Unfortunately for me, I couldn't find a place of residence in the hall of residence, which made the transition for me very difficult. I then had to go and live with a family, a young couple, in then what they call digs; I don't know what the equivalent is in the American system.

I lived with a family. And I lived there for a while, but I never really liked it. I give you a story. During the first few nights, we negotiated the terms, and I thought I had a deal where I had breakfasts and dinner., I thought I understood the English language very well. But I soon found that, and I didn't quite understand the English language until I went back to the digs the first night expecting supper. I was sitting in my room from seven o'clock to nine o'clock, and suddenly, the lady comes up with a cup of Ovaltine or Bonvitta' or whatever the equivalent.

Effiom:

Hot Chocolate drink.

Imomoh:

Hot chocolate with two biscuits. I said, "Is this dinner?" On the Second day, the same thing happened. So, I went back there, I said, "What's this? This lady is short-changing me." "No, no. What was your deal?" I said, "Oh, I agreed that I will have supper." She says okay. I said, "What is the difference between dinner and supper?" She said one is a full-fledged meal, the other one is two biscuits and a cup of hot chocolate. So, I said, "My word. Okay, now I understand. I will then go and have my meal at the university before going back." The second one, if you go to Birmingham, and you think English is one common language, you find that when they speak, you got to listen very carefully, and when you go to Birmingham, they call themselves the Brummies, and when they speak English, you got to listen. So, here was I with my solid Nigerian accent, speaking Nigerian English to them; I said, "Pardon?" They would speak Brummie to me. I said, "Pardon?" So there's a little bit of pardon going up and down between me and them. But eventually, I found some fantastic relationships in there. And even till today, some of the friends we formed there, we still meet every year. I mean, this last summer, I was in the UK, and four of us got together with our families. Now, these are all grandmas and grandpas getting together and having a drink together. So, we found some relationships that have lasted for, I don't know, 50 years. So, it was very enjoyable. Very enjoyable.

Effiom:

That's amazing.

Imomoh:

Yeah.

26:40 New Life, Fatalities, and Kidnappings – The Joys & Sorrows as “Father of the Camp”

Effiom:

Okay, so we'll go back into your career. I would like to ask, what are some of the biggest non-technical challenges you experienced?

Imomoh:

When you ask me, it's a very difficult question, but a couple of them. One is when I was general manager, I was more or less like the father and mother of those who lived in camps, which meant that I got to enjoy the joyful moments and the sad moments. Joyful moments like when people had children or celebrating birthdays. But sad moments when, like probably when I had to go and break news of deaths, particularly deaths arising from operations. Those I found were very difficult because here I was relatively young, then I was maybe early forties as a relatively young man, and yet here was I sort of carrying the load of what I call the father of the camp. So, those issues I found were very, very difficult. And then also, unfortunately, that's when all this kidnapping nonsense started. When they started taking people for ransom. I found it really, really painful when my staff was taken. I wouldn't know when he or she would be released, what terms and what conditions would be demanded. But fortunately, we were very firm in not paying any ransoms. And people were actually released. And I tell you a story once that, this was in Ognu Warri. The camp was close to the riverfront, and for some reason, this man, the wife, and the little girl decided to have a Sunday afternoon close to the waterfront. Some men got in a speed boat and picked up this little girl, took her away, and of course, I was panicked; what would they do? I remained very calm. I said, "Forget it." They were shocked. They said, "What do you mean forget it?" I said, "Forget it." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Look, tell me which Nigerian woman would take a five-year-old expatriate child and not know what to do with it. Watch it. That child is going to come back." Lo and behold, the child was released. The wives of the men said, "Look, come back, take the child. We don't know what to do with her. Take her back." And she came back. I mean, we can tell this story about it now, but you can imagine the trauma which those parents went through. But I just saw it as nothing will happen. I'm not sure about now because people have gotten more vicious and more demanding. But then I said, "No, nothing will happen." And nothing did happen. So, those are trying moments and what I call personal moments where you had actually to share, particularly with the misery that comes with the deaths, fatalities, or what I just mentioned about picking up hostages.

Effiom:

Yes. It's trying times that still continue in the industry

Imomoh:

Well, you know, you say that, but at some point, I find that people began to accept it.

Effiom:

Normalize it.

Imomoh:

Normalize it. It's Become like a statistic. Oh, they've taken another one. I said, "No, it's not another one, it's not another one, it's another father, another husband, another—" You have to look at it in that light. But people thought it was statistics. "Oh, well. No, they took one last week." Another one. Unacceptable.

Effiom:

[There are human beings] behind these numbers.

Imomoh:

I said no, not a number.

30:49 “I Don’t Need to Do a Rehearsal” – Receiving Awards & Recognition

Effiom:

Thanks for sharing that. Let's change gears a little bit to things that might have brought you some more joy, such as awards. Is there any you can think of, or any honors you received that just sticks out?

Imomoh:

I mean, Shell, you got all kinds of awards, and I remember getting the Distinguished Member Award from SPE. I tell you a story; I didn't know what it was all about. then we came to one of those conferences; I can't remember what town it was. They said we're going to have rehearsals to get the Distinguished Members Award. I thought, “Just give me my award, and I'll go”. They said, "No, because tomorrow you have to come for rehearsals." And I said, "No, I don't need to do a rehearsal." Well, no rehearsals, no award. I said, "Okay, I'm coming." Now, why I mention this—when you are aloof and not part of an organization and things are working like clockwork, you don't know what goes behind the scenes. It's only when I got that award I recognized when you sit in the audience and see everything go like clockwork that things that are happening, you usually don't know. I didn't realize that when they read your CV, at a certain point, you have to stop on the line on the stage. Now, because members of the audience don't see that line, they don't know what was happening. And I can tell you that that little experience has sort of gone on in my life now, where, if I'm organizing an event, we have to do rehearsals. Because that makes it look so effortless.

Effiom:

Yes.

Imomoh:

Perfect. Like clockwork.

Effiom:

Flawless. Yes.

Imomoh:

Otherwise, you go there, anything can happen and things don't work as well as you want.

Imomoh:

Also, I got an honorary award as well. I didn't even know how they put it all together, but some people thought I deserved it. And so, that's what I got.

Effiom:

I'm sure you did.

Imomoh:

Yeah.

33:09 On the Path to Becoming SPE President

Effiom:

Now we're going to talk a little bit more about your experience in SPE, especially being the first African to hold the position of the SPE president. So, what was that like? And can you share some highlights from that.

Imomoh:

Well, let's go back. I told you I studied mechanical engineering and then trained as a petroleum engineer. What struck me is that I knew I couldn't then go the professional route and get registered as a mechanical engineer. Because I was not practicing as a mechanical engineer. There were some of my friends and colleagues in industry who had studied in America and knew about the SPE. So, they decided that we were going to found the SPE in Lagos in 1973. we then formed the SPE, I don't know what position I had; I think that position was financial secretary there. that's what then started my interest in SPE. Now, where could I find knowledge? Where could I be exposed to new things that are happening in the industry where I was? So, that was SPE. We started in 1973, and from there, I became, you know, various other positions in SPE. At that time, the African region was part of Europe. then suddenly I got a call from somebody, I think it was John Colligan, and said, "Egbert, I think I found a new vision in Africa. Were you interested?" Sounds very interesting, why not? So, I was invited then and became the first regional director for Africa. And it was tough then because I was then deputy managing director of SPDC as well. So, it was not easy to combine being a director for Africa traveling for board meetings, and it was difficult trying to combine. Those days, there was no Wi-Fi or laptop or email or anything. You had to carry your files with you wherever you went. When I came back from the SPE conference, I had to sit and do catch up with work for God knows how long. So, it was tough trying to combine them, but we did it, and somewhere along the line, we found we navigated a way that allowed us to combine those two jobs. A very exciting time. I always told people, sitting on that board, you're getting free advice from twenty-two wise men and women, which is not so easy to come by. So, it was really not only technical but geographic learning. That's when you have this whole regional experience coming in, and the whole idea was the internationalization of SPE. So that was also exciting times.

Effiom:

I think I share your excitement about it being also from the Lagos section that is celebrating 50 years anniversary in 2023. I can also relate to how much work it is as a regional director and a full-time job. So, I can definitely relate with how it's really challenging but exciting.

Imomoh:

You're handling the job better than I did. I got gray hairs when I was much younger.

Effiom:

Indeed, indeed. But yes, I can definitely relate to that. And I would like to, and we'll talk a little bit about recommendations to young people, but for now, I want to hear how your involvement at SPE evolved over time.

Imomoh:

I think I was then regional director in 2000 and 2002. It went beyond my retirement, and I was still coming to conferences. Because once you become a regional director, you form personal relationships. I was still coming to ATCE, and lo and behold, I was invited to go and shoot a video about being SPE president. I think, okay, we're going to shoot a video, I'll shoot a video. Which we then did, then ask you questions; think about 13 questions or thereabouts. So, what you want to do, your vision for SPE? So, we did that, and that went through the nominations committee, and then suddenly I got a call: you're going to be the next SPE president. Oh, wow. Then I was working for Afren, which was good for a small company like that; to have one of your founding members become SPE president was good. So, they gave me full support. Full support having, I mean not like COVID where you couldn't travel. We traveled all over the world, some exciting places and which just went very well. So, thank God it happened then. The company was able to support the travel and the time as well. So, I remain very grateful to them every day of my life.

Effiom:

And I see you're still very, very passionate about SPE. You still support; you came to the board meeting today and gave a presentation from the SPE Foundation. So, it's definitely a passion of yours.

Imomoh:

Well, you know, the thing is that if I do something, I do it well. I don't know how to be half passionate about something. It's like my playing golf; I'm passionate about playing golf. I can't be half passionate about something. So yeah, I've enjoyed it. And it's funny when a friend of mine saw me after the last conference in Lagos and said somebody told me he saw Egbert at the SPE conference. Yeah. He says, "Yeah, he's there." He said, "Even when he turns 90, he'll be coming to SPE conferences." God, let me be 90, then I will simply come to SPE conferences.

Effiom:

That would be something to see.

Imomoh:

So, I enjoy it, and it's true that I enjoy meeting young people. You meet different people all the time.

Effiom:

What were your favorite memories or travels from your SPE presidency? Or did you have any particularly memorable sections or activities that you embarked on?

Imomoh:

The ones I really enjoy was visiting the student sections. It was, you know, each time you went, they really were excited about having the president come and visit them, and they went out of their way to make your presence most welcome. And you got the feeling that they, you know, they look forward to the president's visit. And it's therefore, each time I went to a country, I always made sure that I had a visit to a student section. But thinking back, one of the ones we really enjoyed, we went to India. I hadn't been to India for a long time, and then the director from India arranged for us to have a super duper, uh, dinner and one of these big palaces, and he stood up and said, well, the last time this palace was open to anybody was when president so and so from America I don't want to mention the name, came to visit and they don't actually open that place. So I stood up and said, well, do you know what I mean? You know, we are even better because today we have three presidents. The incoming president, current president, and past presidents are entertaining three presidents in this room. So, I thought that was I thought I'd rather make that point.

Imomoh:

My wife and I enjoyed going to Peru. There's something about Peru was very nice, very idyllic country. Pretty country, uh, a lot to see. And then we went to Venezuela, and Venezuela was it was a mixture of two things: the sadness of what had happened to that country. And, uh, I always joke that when I went to some of you remember the type of old cars we used to see in Warri in those days, were still in Venezuela because the place had been run down. And recently I gave a talk to about Nigeria industry. I said, well, let's be careful that we don't go down that route because the resources under the ground do not necessarily make you rich. Those resources do not make a country rich. It's how you manage, how you handle those resources, how you bring them into production. That's what translates into a country being rich. And I just hope that you know our dear country doesn't go down that route. So those are sort of little snippets of what we enjoyed. And clearly, students, I enjoyed visiting student sections and 1 or 2 countries that just mentioned. Yeah.

Effiom:

Awesome.

42:17 "SPE is You and You are SPE" – The Benefits of SPE Involvement

Effiom:

If you were to recommend SPE to young graduates, what would you tell him or her about it?

Imomoh:

Do you know– there's so much knowledge in SPE. So much you can get out of it, but it shouldn't be a one-way traffic. You should also be thinking of what you give back to SPE. I know it's strange that I met the incoming president of SPE from Dallas. I visited him when I was SPE president, and he said he

remembered what I told him when I visited Dallas. He said, "Ah, you said something I always remember. You said SPE is you, and you are SPE." So, it's a two-way thing; not just what you get out of SPE, what you also give back to SPE makes a lot of difference. Give back by volunteering your time, give back by contributing your talents, but, you know, attending conferences galvanizing activities that can also give something to SPE. Think about it. Not just what do I get out of it. SPE, give and take. Give and take.

Effiom:

I do agree. And I tell people, you get as much as you give.

Imomoh:

Sure.

Effiom:

If you put minimal effort into it, you get minimal benefit from it.

Imomoh:

Sure.

Effiom:

But how has that membership benefited your career?

Imomoh:

It's difficult to say. I mean, per se, for me, my knowledge base broadened. But I don't think that Shell looked at me and said, "Okay, your membership of SPE gives you a leg up for the next job." Never worked like that. And I don't think that's the way you should work. It's what you yourself garner from being in it. How does it affect your knowledge base? How does it affect your interrelationship with other people? Those are the kinds of things you get. But I cannot say, well, SPE has made me get a promotion from this job to that job. Thinking back, not really.

44:36 Is There a Future in Oil & Gas?

Effiom:

I can relate to that. But in your own opinion, how do you think we can attract young people into the industry now?

Imomoh:

It's tough. It's really tough now. What I mean by that is that here is an industry where a lot of people say that it's sunset time. In thirty years' time, you will have all the internal combustion engines, kaput. Everything we'll do is either we're in solar or hydro. And you're going to say to yourself, as a young man, is that the industry I want to go into? But what I tell people that, you know, zero net emission doesn't

mean zero production of oil and gas. This world will continue to need oil and gas for a long time to come. If anything, it might be even more difficult because now the terrain which we are going to be operating is more difficult. The process of extracting what is left is going to be more demanding than when I joined. At that time, it was drill, perforate, and production. I think that the knowledge base is going to be more demanding. I don't think the industry's going to face sunset, even beyond the thirty years we talk about stuffing internal combustion engines. I can still see that, at least in some parts of the world. Let's get it quite correct as well. That there are parts of the world that are not yet ready, and the pace is going to be different. So, I think somewhere like Nigeria and some of the developing world will still need a lot of oil and gas to bring their standard of living up to the standard of the Western world because those people also have a right to increase their standard of living and not just quench the industry. If I were to use my manager's language, I'd question the industry because other parts of the world that have benefited from that now say, "Ah, no, no, no. We can't produce because it's causing environmental issues."

46:54 "Know More Than Just Your Industry" – Advice for Young Engineers

Effiom:

what advice would you give to today's young leaders in the engineering profession?

Imomoh:

Well, clearly, you need to know more than just your industry. You need to know all things issued around society; you need to be politically aware of what is happening around the world. The whole issue about the IT world, The Use of IT as a tool to help you, is going to be quite dominant in what people are doing. Probably more than in my own time, and the world is getting more global. You've got to be alert to what's happening, stay in tune with what's happening, and create room to learn other things. I agree that the whole issue about the environment, solar, and all of that will continue. So, you should not bury your head in a barrel of water and think that's the whole of the energy mix. You'd be in for a surprise; the energy mix is changing. So, your knowledge base has to change as well to match that energy mix.

Effiom:

Okay, thank you.

48:17 No Regrets – Looking Back at a Fulfilling Career

Effiom:

Do you have any regrets regarding the career you chose and where it has taken you, or anything you wish you could have done differently?

Imomoh:

Not at all. I told you my dad wanted me to be a doctor, but I'm not sure I could have stood the sight of blood and all of that. I feel satisfied. My career has been, as a plan; I don't think I could have planned it any differently. I joined as a very young engineer. I had all the opportunities in Shell; I had opportunities to grow in Shell. I left Shell and formed a new company. That company then took off, and then,

unfortunately, something happened that brought it crashing down. We learned from that. Yeah, I am still busy, involved in a number of non-oil things, involved in a number of companies as directors of companies. I'm still busy meeting young people like you at conferences. So, I feel satisfied. I feel I don't have any regrets at all. I mean, the only thing I said, if all I knew was what I now know, maybe I would jump ship and not stay fully in the career that I did to become deputy managing director of Shell. I would Create something new, something fresh, and make it really successful. Because I've seen some who have done it, and I really say, maybe that's what I should have done. But never mind.

Effiom:

You didn't do too badly yourself.

Imomoh:

No. I haven't. I haven't.

Effiom:

That's good.

49:54 “Don't Look for Shortcuts” – Thoughts on Corporate Governance

You said something I just want us to talk about a little bit. You got me curious when you talked about your learning from the mistakes that the company Afren had made. Is there anything you'd like to share?

Imomoh:

Well, it's a very delicate matter, but you see, I am one person; I don't know how to half trust people. I trust you, or I don't trust you. If I don't trust you, I don't do business with you, period. And if I trust you, then I trust you. Totally. I think what happened was maybe one trusted fully and totally, and eventually, that trust was misused, abused, and caused problems that were not necessary for the company. I think also people should learn to be satisfied with what they get in life. If you have already looked into your neighbor's garden and you think it is greener than yours, then, of course, you never have time to look at yours. So, if you don't mind, I mean, it's an issue I wouldn't want to go any more deeply.

Effiom:

No, and we don't necessarily need to. But I think it's just a note of caution. You mentioned it earlier when you said if you succeed, it's a very good opportunity. If you don't, it's also at great cost to yourself.

Imomoh:

But a lot of successes are not technical. This is just a purely mismanagement of a situation. I mean, the two companies we were managing had assets that had not been performing well, and then they started performing well. They just took a position that was wrong.

Effiom:

And that was why I asked about non-technical challenges because I find that with technology and with all the knowledge, we really can get the technical things right. We've got all this knowledge base. We are a global community. Even if you just learn from SPE, you will figure out the technical things; what nobody really prepares you for is some of the non-technical challenges that can actually make a big difference. And that's what I have seen in my experience,

Imomoh:

They call it corporate governance these days.

Effiom:

Absolutely. Whether it's the political or it's the commercial and all those other things around that are not technical, those are the things that really make us trip. I think we, as technical people, tend to get sidelined by those kinds of experiences. That's why I just wanted you to talk a little bit about it. That's enough to keep at the back of our minds and something that we should definitely be thinking about.

Imomoh:

Well, clearly, there are all kinds of things that help you now. I mean good corporate governance; you can have all kinds of programs that teach you corporate governance. But I always tell people the best corporate governance you have is what your conscience tells you should do and not do. If you have a conscience, that's which is implanted in you by some will say, I believe in divine intervention. People know what's right and wrong. They pretend sometimes they don't know what is right and wrong. They know. Most people do. And if you take an instance where companies have failed, it's not because they didn't know what was right or wrong. Some of them knew.

Effiom:

And they did it.

Imomoh:

Some took shortcuts or thought they could do something and not get caught. I remember, I Mark Moody-Stuart, was E and P coordinator; he said something many years ago. He said, "If you are about to do something as a senior executive in the company, ask yourself if that issue appears in front of the Financial Times tomorrow, how would you like it? How would you respond?" And what does that mean? It exposes you to the world. If you feel comfortable about what you're about to do, and it's known by one, two, three, four, five, or a thousand people. Are you okay with it? But most times, when we say just me and you only, nobody else knows about it. That's where we go wrong. They think they can get away with it, and quite often, they get caught. So many times, they got caught.

Effiom:

Indeed.

Imomoh:

They get caught out. Let me put it that way.

Effiom:

Thank you.

Imomoh:

I think that's what I'll tell young people. Don't look for shortcuts as well. Shortcuts are full of all kinds of things that you're not even thinking about. So, do things properly. Do things properly.

Effiom:

What a fascinating career you've had, and such a full life. I've learned a lot from this interaction. It's been a pleasure to spend this time with you. Thank you so much again for your willingness to share your story with AIME.

Imomoh:

Thank you.