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What is to be done about Nigerian education? (1)

The recently concluded 20th Summit of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) (March 18-20 in Abuja) represents a landmark in the public discourses on the crisis in Nigerian education. The summit brought together a brilliant company of scholars, teachers, businessmen and public officials who not only understood just what is wrong with our educational system but what needs to be done about it.

Also present was a mass of school children who listened and learned and then had a chance, on the last day, to make their own representations regarding the crisis and what should be done to end it.

In the weeks preceding the summit, NESG officials set the tone by widely circulating five weighty questions regarding the state of Nigerian education, and invited the public to come to the summit and “join the discourse” on “how to fix Nigeria’s education system” or how to device “a governance and accountability framework” for it.

The five questions were as follows:

1. There are 57 million out-of-school children in the world. 10.5 million of these are Nigerians. What kind of future can Nigeria build with an uneducated citizenry?
2. No Nigerian university is ranked amongst the top 1000 universities. No wonder there's an exodus of Nigerian students to foreign universities. How can we reverse this trend?
3. Harvard produces the most CEOs; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) produces the best engineers; Yale University produces the best lawyers. What do Nigerian universities produce? STRIKES?
4. Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark, Jadesola Akande, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Dr Niyi Osundare, Professor Umaru Shehu: products of the golden years of Nigeria's education system. Can we find a successor generation in a system that is broken and perpetually on strike?
5. Nigeria's best university in 2013 only ranked 1,926th in the world. Nigeria's best academic institution cannot compete

globally. What can we do to raise the standard of Nigeria's education system to a globally competitive level?

These and other heavy questions were considered in some detail between presenters and an interactive audience. The NESG secretariat is compiling the answers and resolutions and will, according to its custom, forward these to the federal government to digest and incorporate into its action program on education.

But beyond the euphoria of the summit, the sense that "something is being done," every thinking Nigerian should be pondering these questions and, alone or in league with other concerned citizens, working up a blueprint, however fragmentary, for reviving and modernizing our educational system. In this column I shall attempt to bring together my own thoughts, synthesizing and updating three decades of my newspaper articles and lectures on these issues. And I invite you, the general public, to join me in the discourse on the pages of *BusinessDay*. Articles should be 800-900 words. Longer articles may be shortened to fit the space—or perhaps serialized in two or more parts.

To me it is quite clear that alongside security and jobs, education is and ought to be this nation's highest priority. Without

security of life and property; without productive enterprises to engage the energies and provide decent wages for our teeming millions; without the understanding of self and the modern world, underwired by intellectual and technical skills acquired through a soundly conceived and variegated scheme of education and training—without these, Nigeria is going nowhere at all! Everything else depends heavily on this three-cornered, inter-dependent and inseparable foundational base: *security, jobs, and education*. The planning for the one must entail the other two.

When you think about it, you wonder how anyone could have thought otherwise. But knowing it is not enough: it's the *doing it*. The planning and consistent execution of policies regarding security, job creation and education must go hand in hand always. The fact that up to this point it has not is at the heart of our national crisis.

To the question: *What kind of future can Nigeria build with an uneducated citizenry?* The answer, to put it in bold and possibly exaggerated terms, is: *Boko Haram!* When you sow *no* (or low) *education, no* (modern industrial) *skills*, and *no jobs* (no industrial enterprises where the young can earn a decent living), you reap *armed robbery, kidnapping, and Boko Haram*.

In short, with an uneducated citizenry Nigeria has no future.

Gone are the dark ages when a tiny educated and monied aristocracy sat on the heads of a mass of illiterate and unskilled peasants and laborers. Mass education, science, technical and vocational skills, jobs, industrial production, participatory democracy, a level playing field, equal economic opportunity—these are now the global norms; and their forward march is inexorable.

The monied aristocracy of Nigeria may struggle to preserve and continue the outmoded system of *serfs and overlords*—but it won't be for long. And Boko Haram is but a preview of the horrors that await. For what is Boko Haram but the vanguard of a massive rebellion of the uneducated and neglected underclass who have come to the conclusion that western education is evil because all it does is confer fabulous wealth on a few while the overwhelming majority suffer in wretchedness and want? . . .

• *To be continued*

(856 words)

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What is to be done about Nigerian education? (2)

From Wale Micaiah on Education

In a joint paper, the UIS and the EFA Global Monitoring Report have outlined five reasons why education must be addressed urgently:

- *Education reduces poverty and promotes economic growth*
- *Maternal education improves children's nutrition and chances of survival*
- *Education helps fight HIV/AIDS and other diseases*
- *Education promotes gender equality*
- *Education promotes democracy and participation in society*

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Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained".

James A. Garfield (1880).

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa

" It is possible to store the mind with a million facts and still be entirely uneducated".

Alec Bourne

"The strength of the United States is not the gold at Fort Knox or the weapons of mass destruction that we have, but the sum total of the education and the character of our people".

Claiborne Pell

The Role of Education

In modern times, education has been marketed in terms of career advancement, higher salary scale, and competitive advantage in the job market. But actually education is about learning, preparing for wise leadership and personal achievement, opening one's mind to new ideas, and strengthening the competitive advantage of a nation. According to Learningcity.org:

Main purpose of education is to educate individuals within society, to prepare and qualify them for work in economy as well as to integrate people into society and teach them values and morals of society. Education in society prepares youngsters for adulthood so that they may form the next generation of leaders. It will yield strong families and strong communities".

It is for this reason that "The quality of human resource of a nation is easily judged by the number of literate population living in it. This is to say that education is a must if a nation aspires to achieve growth and development and more importantly sustain it" (Manu Goel, Keydegree.com).

Therefore a good education serves two major purposes - equipping individuals for career advancement and developing citizens for their responsibilities to the people and country. Consequently, a good education system can be assessed by its ability to equip students with knowledge and skills required to participate effectively as member of society and contribute towards the development of shared values and common identity. A good education system nurtures nationalism and lifetime commitment to motherland. This is very much reflected in Benjamin Rush's view of what education should cover:

Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it."

In response to the prominence of the global knowledge economy, the advanced nations of Europe, Asia and America have moved a step above the concept of investment in education into one of investing in knowledge. Investment in knowledge is "defined and calculated as the sum of expenditure on R&D, on total higher education (public and private) and on software... It includes current expenditures, such as on education and R&D, as well as capital outlays, such as purchases of software and construction of school buildings" (OECD Country statistical profiles 2009). The table below is the statistics on investment in knowledge for 18 European and American countries.

Investment in knowledge per country (%age of GDP)

Source: OECD

Country statistical profiles (2009)

As a confident and patriotic citizen of Nigeria/Africa, I owe it all to education. It gave me the opportunity to travel, work and experience civilizations – from South Africa, Ghana, United Kingdom, Russia, Ukraine, Singapore, Thailand, to many great cities of China, and counting. The privilege of working with professionals from different countries, and active participation in educating, program development/management, pastoring and graduating hundreds of students from different nationalities, races and religious persuasions, is the most rewarding. These experiences have developed a passion in me for change, not only in my country of origin, but throughout the continent of Africa. It is for this reason that I established this charity – Openmind Foundation; for I recognise

that deep-down-education is the only way by which our people can truly be free. Not just storing the mind with millions of facts but also having the mind reprogrammed and ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future. As part of this initiative, this article examines the education policy of two highly educationally successful countries – Singapore and Finland. Singapore and Finland have become world renowned for their education systems, though they achieved their success using quite different approaches. The history, natural resource limitations and recorded economic, political, social and technological advancements of these countries, make them role models for Nigeria/Africa. First, let's take a tour of education policy and challenges in Nigeria.

Education policy in Nigeria

A report produced by Teboho Moja, Visiting Professor of Higher Education – New York University, for the World Bank in 2000, documented the following findings on Nigeria education system:

“Over the past decade, Nigeria has been plagued by frequent political unrest. This political instability has generated negative effects on the education system. Although education had been in crisis for many years, the situation has recently been made worse by frequent strikes staged by students, faculty and teachers. Much of the difficulty lies in the fact that the sector is poorly funded. This results in shortages of material and human resources for education: lack of qualified teachers; a brain drain from the public sector; few instructional inputs, shortage of classrooms, and a host of other problems”.

These difficulties have been most pronounced at the foundation levels of education. Both primary and secondary school levels have been negatively affected. In 1997 the Federal Minister of Education, following a nation-wide tour of the schools, stated that the basic infrastructure in schools such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, sporting facilities, equipment, libraries were in a state of total decay. The physical condition of most schools was reported to be pathetic.

Education has been at the top of the priority lists of some previous Nigerian governments yet the education system is still far from being ready for the challenges

of the new century. Universal primary education has been a stated priority of every Nigerian government since its introduction in the seventies. The actual commitment of the different governments to the scheme, however, has varied substantially.

The report went further to indicate the scale of funding required to put the education system back on track - roughly 210 Million US Dollars - a 'chicken change', compared to the earning power of the Nigerian state. It states:

The areas targeted for immediate attention and the estimated costs of the projects have been listed as follows:*

1. Access to basic education (179,5 million Naira)
2. Massive reduction of illiteracy as part of a strategy for poverty alleviation (1,6 billion Naira)
3. Improvement of quality in higher education (7,050 billion Naira)
4. Technical and vocational education (1,1 billion Naira)
5. Teacher training (11 billion Naira)

The costs given for each area are estimates but indicate the scale of funding - roughly USD 210 million - needed for the anticipated reforms.

On the issue of cultism in Higher Education, the report concludes:

The practice of cult activities is a problem that has its root in the society and has infiltrated the entire higher education system. The conditions in higher education institutions, such as overcrowding, deteriorated facilities, admissions malpractice and inadequately challenging academic programs have been blamed for encouraging the emergence of secret cults in the system. Cult activities have had an extremely negative impact on learning and discipline in the institutions.

Someone reading this article might argue, rightly of course, the 2000 World Bank report referred to above is eleven years old. Current information on Nigeria is hard to come by. Students writing a project on Nigeria can testify to this, so I have had to use the 2000 report since the only one I could reach. For the sake of such argument, let's fast forward to 2010. Shortly after Nigeria hosted the

2010 conference of E-9 countries, in an article titled "sad state of education in the country, All Africa.com observed:

In most schools, the conducive physical and psychological environment for teaching and learning is absent. Basic facilities like desks and chairs, chalkboards, libraries, laboratories, toilets and sports facilities do not exist, especially in public schools, where even classrooms sometimes do not exist, or lack roofs! Teachers are poorly motivated, in many cases poorly trained or even untrained, with low self-esteem. Predictably, it is difficult to maintain professional ethics or high productivity under such frustrating conditions" (6 July, 2010).

The impact of many years of neglect of the education sector is not only fuelling poverty, crime, cultism, corruption and other social issues, it has considerably affected Nigeria's ability to drum up a reservoir of knowledge-base to power centres of excellence and found the country's competitive advantage in the emerging global knowledge economy. For example:

- *"Although Nigeria is Africa's largest country with 20 percent of the region's population, Nigeria has only 15 scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million persons. This compares with 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India, and 4,103 in the United States (WORLD BANK 2002a:Table 5.11). What chance does Nigeria have of participating in the emerging global knowledge economy? (Saint et al, 2003).*
- *"Nigeria's number of scientific publications for 1995 was 711 – significantly less than its output of 1,062 scientific publications in 1981 by a comparatively much smaller university system (TASK FORCE 2000). In contrast, scientific publications were 3,413 for South Africa, 14,883 for India, 310 for Indonesia, and 5,440 for Brazil (TASK FORCE 2000)" (ibid).*
- This is also reflecting negatively on the quality of our workforce and leaderships, from faith/business organisations to federal, state and local governments. It is not the letters behind the name that counts, for "it is possible to store the mind with a million facts and still be entirely uneducated" (Alec Bourne). Moreover, "the world cares very little about what a man or woman knows; it is what the man or woman is able to do that counts." (Booker T. Washington).

Research suggests that public policy plays an important role in shaping national innovative capacity by determining human capital investments and creating incentives for innovation. In recent years, the economic success of newly industrializing nations (e.g., the "Asian tigers") has been linked to substantial prior investment in human resources (Sainta et al, 2003). Though Nigeria is projected by analysts as a sleeping economic giant/tiger, it is in fact a deformed giant, taking into consideration the short / long-term consequences of its education policy and system. This questions the wisdom, goals, and planning behind the Vision 2020 being promoted vigorously. Could this end up another white elephant with sunk billions and nothing to show for it? For a plan that is due for delivery in 9

years time, where is the foundation, particularly in terms of quality of manpower, now and in the future, and the infrastructures to engineer and sustain this vision?

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I am a double graduate of University of Wales and the President of Openmind Foundation (UK/Nigeria). We are working to change the world's view of Nigeria.

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