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Towards Improving The Status Of Higher Education In Nigeria

Adesoji Oni

Alade Abiodun

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Introduction

It is rewarding to begin this discussion by first of all reflecting on the concept of education. The term education is quite elusive and very difficult to pin down to a single definition. This is because numerous authorities in different fields define and describe education as it appeals to them and their background. In any case, education is what help us to acquire suitable appreciation of our cultural heritage and to live a fully more satisfying life. This includes the acquisition of desirable knowledge, skills, habits, values for productive living in the society. It equips the members of any human group with the capabilities of personal survival in and contributing to other group survival in the wider world. (Alade, 2006). The foregoing explains that the end and purposes of education include the cognitive development, the development of deeper intellectual skills, the acquisition of mechanical skills and character training concerned with the appreciations, feelings and values of those educated.

It is also crystal clear that education reverse to both the process by which we acquire knowledge, skills, habits and values as well as the results of the process, that involves both learning and teaching. So no one would doubt the value of being educated in any community. A clear testimony to this statement is in the adage; “if you plan for one year, plant rice; if you plan for 10 years, plant trees, if you plan for 100 years, educate a person”. Yes indeed, the best and long lasting gift any one can offer to someone or a community in this regard is good education. This is unambiguously incompatible to the gift of silver, gold or diamond. Education is one of the correlates of socio-economic, cultural, political, democratic, technological and medico-legal development of a nation.

Education thus restores to mankind its humanity. It is globally a very vital element for social development and economic growth all over the world. This explains why nations have expended a lot of resources on education. Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (Okebukola, 2000). Yet the potential of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance among others. Now, these old challenges have been augmented by new challenges linked to the growing role of knowledge in economic development, rapid changes in telecommunication technology, and the globalization of trade and labor markets (Obi, 2003).

Education is often linked to schooling, and schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labor as well as bringing about empowerment. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to basic education. Education as a social institution therefore could be seen as a great value concerned with imparting knowledge and skills which help an individual to participate in society. (Ramon-Yusuf, 2003). At the tertiary levels, it is no news that university system is a medium through which objectives of education are expected to be achieved. In an examination of the concept of “University”, Adebayo (2005) declared that in the middle ages, the word universitas meant “an association, a guild, a corporation”, just like a guild of craftsmen or traders. The University at the beginning was an

association of teachers or scholars. The University was a body of persons gathered in a particular place for the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge in advanced fields of study. Today, the university is an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorized to grant academic and innovation for the over all socio-economic empowerment of individual and community development (Babalola & Okediran, 1997).

Buttressing this view Cabal (1993), posited that the objectives or goals of establishing a university differ from one society to another. It is assumed that University generally are, by definition and long established tradition, meant to be places where all learning activities are normally governed by creative skepticism, constant questioning, disputations and argumentation. These are encouraged not as ends in themselves, but as a means of ensuring the discovery of novel, economic empowerment, human and societal development, and better solutions to both the results of the shortcomings in the expectation of tertiary institutions and their products.

Section B sub-section 59 of Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) articulates the goals of tertiary education in the country thus, to:

- a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and 'appreciate their local and external environments;
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will .enable individuals to be self – reliant and useful members of the society
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. Forge and cement national unity', and
- g. Promote national and international understanding

World Bank (2002) in clarifying the above stated objectives of universities pointed out that “teaching and research” are the intellectual functions” of the universities and they are in connection with the education mission of education function” which incorporates cultivation of the mind and the ‘transmission of basic ideas and concepts”. Whereas, service is the “social function’ or social role of the university which provides the link between the intellectual and education roles of the university and development of society on the other. In carrying out these functions, the components discussed in this paper along with the mutual interaction within the university and the society major determinants.

Unfortunately in Nigeria the current reality that stares us at the face is that in spite of the huge expenditure on education at all levels, our education has failed to produce in school leavers a combination of skills and value system that could make them self reliant. The Nigeria educational system has been beset with a number of ills over the years. These problems arose from the general malaise that beset the leadership and the society at large, some of these include the high incidence of examination malpractices, extortion, cultism, sexual harassment, and incessant strikes among the various academic unions at all levels of education, as well as problem of data and decay infrastructure,

etc. All these have led to fallen standards and the failure to realize the philosophy and the objectives of education. These have further been accentuated by the general ethical crises that are confronting the Nigerian society.

To say that the delivery of University education in the country today is in a state of crisis is perhaps, to put it mildly complaints are rife from every quarter. Employers worry that Nigerian graduates today are unemployable unless their prospective employers put them through a crash remedial program. We hear of graduates in the Humanities who are hardly capable of putting a sentence of English together correctly and whose spoken English is even worse. Fresh graduates in engineering, we are told, have little clue when put in a workshop. Worse still, graduates are unrefined in character. (Adebayo, 2005).

Adebayo (2005) buttressed further that the decay in our Universities was the object of concern of The Dean of the School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, when he decried that-

Nigerian universities are under the siege of decay, There are no facilities for effective practical for the students in most of our courses, especially in the technological universities, which require a lot of intensive training in terms of how the student can use his hand and how he can use some hi- tech equipment. Most of these equipment are either not there and if they are there they are not functioning and money is not coming. And in fact, when universities face accreditation exercises, it is shameful to observe that in order to scale the hurdle of accreditation, some departments have to borrow equipment from neighboring and sister institutions and present them, claiming that these are their equipment....(p.6)

We can all agree that, indeed, the situation is worrisome and that the universities have been crippled academically, practically and even, morally, For how else can one describe the situation where academic sacrifice the foundation of their profession, that is TRUTH and engage in compromise as a form of survival even when it is clear that the major stakeholders in the university system are clearly to blame for the dilapidation of the university system that we have today. It is obvious that Nigerian higher education and University Education in particular is facing unprecedented challenges. Its operations are bedeviled with obstacles in providing the education relevant to her society.

The Daily Sun editorial of 14 July 2005 decried 'Universities embarrassing science laboratories' and stated sarcastically that it is no surprise that Nigeria's attempt at scientific and technological achievements has so far failed. After an examination of nine universities across Nigeria, it arrived at the conclusion that,

they are saddled with obsolete British imperial system equipment in their engineering workshops, So there are equipment, which are ill use, calibrated in imperial unit, while the entire world has switched to the System international (SI) unit (p.4).

Without the right equipment, chemicals, reagents etc. how could the universities impart the right knowledge in its students. How can they fulfill their functions as producers and disseminators of knowledge? How could they advance the society at any level? How could the teachers compare favorably with their counterparts in civilized parts of the world? Little wonder then that most academics no longer publish in reputable foreign journals because they are peddling obsolete ideas.

Adebayo (2005) concluded that the delivery of university education in Nigeria is therefore definitely far from the way the founding fathers conceived it. Its success has been hampered seriously by factors ranging from undue government interference and control through the National Universities Commission (NUC), and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), to financial strangulation, lack of planning and prudence, incompetence of both academic and administrative staff lack of commitment on the part of stakeholders, insalubrious environment that is poisonous to learning, the wrong quality of students, students, fraudulent and cultic practices among many others.

It must also be recognized that efforts to improve university system management and governance have been confounded by a pervasive culture of corruption within Nigeria society. A long tradition of weak governance oversight and limited management accountability under a succession of military governments seems to have made corruption endemic to Nigeria at the end of the 20th century. This led the global corruption watchdog organization, Transparency International to rank Nigeria as the world's most corrupt nation in 2000 (TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL 2000). It is not surprising that social malignancy has also extended to the federal universities. Reports of result falsification, plagiarism, cheating, examination malfeasance, sexual harassment, contract kickbacks, and the obligatory purchase by students of professorial lecture notes have regularly appeared in Nigerian newspapers in recent years. Prior to becoming the head of the National Universities Commission in 2001, Prof Peter Okebukola denounced the "growing menace of student gangsterism, cult practices, examination malpractice, and other forms of violence and disruptive behavior s" within the university system (Okebukola, 1997). Clearly, progress, towards more responsive university governance and more innovative university management will be difficult until the political will can be found to tackle such deep-seated social dysfunction.

Moreover, frequency of strikes among academic and non –academic staff is also noticeable in our tertiary institutions, while the problem of quality control has also been noted by Babalola (2004) that government kept on spending huge amount of money on public schools and teachers' day-in-day-out with less than expected outcomes. In spite of its huge investment in public schooling, and unlike any private investor, the government makes minimum efforts to ensure and control the quality of the education it provides. Governments provide warmth and wages to their staff but not very watchful about wastage. One could observe from the explanation above that Nigerian higher education system was excellent before, but now commonly accepted that the system has failed. Graduates have worthless degrees and that it is nearly impossible to find qualified staff to run the university and teach. Given the level of descent and decay of our university system, can we aspire to a world-class system? When? How? Where lie the responsibilities?"

Nwana (2000) argued that the incidence of cultism and robbery has in recent time also increased among Nigerian undergraduates. Many youths are increasingly involved as agents of electoral rigging, political thugery, smuggling, fraudsters and other economic crimes. Many of them have joined the various ethnic militia and even the newly emerging kidnapping squads. These manifestations, by implication, have largely affected Nigerian university education at various times. In addition, the current reality that stares us at the face in Nigeria is that in spite of the huge expenditure on education at the higher levels, education has failed to produce appropriate and commensurate values and development. Such education has failed to produce in school leavers a combination of skills and value system that could make them self-reliant and as agents to subdue their environment and engender development. Many of these qualities were undercut starting in the 1970s when the Nigerian

government reduced allocations to higher education, while simultaneously establishing new universities, primarily for political reasons, and frequently installing military officers as chief administrators. The outcome was reduced research focus and reduction in other inputs that support excellence in higher education. During this period of time, allocation for higher education has dropped by nearly 30%, while demand has grown by nearly 80%. (Adebayo,2004). The situation was the result of larger civil and economic unrest and the introduction of government policy that: * impoverished the academic class through compensation reductions;

- generated unrest resulting in strikes and extended closure of universities;
- created a military-oriented, insular, academic class with little connection to international practice;
- promoted the flight of Nigeria's strongest academics to more developed economic; and
- resulted in general isolation from the larger global education community.

Considering the above stated universally accepted policy objectives of universities, and the problem confronting Nigerian Higher education, which is preventing it from being relevant in this age of globalization, one can pause a little bit and ask, to what extent does university education system in Nigeria assist Nigerians to grow, develop and progress towards a more humane and liberated direction by transcending their limits? We may also need to ask ourselves, what should be the role of university education in Nigeria's national development in this age of globalization that will make Nigeria university education to be relevant to the needs of her society and be ranked as one of the best in the world? Inanswering the above questions, there is the need for us to pause and consider those major challenges facing Nigerian universities.

Challenges Facing Higher Education in Nigeria

In specific terms, a lot of challenges are facing higher education in Nigeria which made it difficult for it to achieve its objectives. These include among others:

Relevance of curriculum content and choice: Okebukola (2003) revealed that while the contents of the minimum standard course descriptions laid down by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) for Nigerian universities agreed well with course contents of universities in most developed nations, a gap still exists in the implementation. Instead of implementing the NUC minimum standard, most of the courses offered in Nigerian universities, which were initially meant to develop people for bureaucratic functions in the society, are not well taught since in this age of globalization, some lecturers merely dictate notes they copied as students without regular updating.

Quality of teaching and learning: The increased enrolment in Nigerian universities in face of dwindling resources into the university system also affect graduate output. Consequently, there were incessant strike actions by academics, non-academic staff and university students between these periods. Thus, the time available for teaching .and learning became disturbingly reduced; university teachers became unmotivated to teach, and students became unmotivated to learn;classrooms and laboratories became non-conducive for educational activities; and teaching contents became alarmingly reduced within the time available. With this trend compounding itself in 1990s, universities in Nigeria, increasingly continued to manufacture half-baked graduates from heavily congested and obsolete factories.

Contrary to what it was in the earlier stage: of university education in Nigeria, today, general commitment to teaching and learning (to scholarship) has become extremely very low.

Administrative and financial autonomy: The increase in the number of university enrolment and wide staffing capacity and poor funding made the university to consistently demand for administrative and financial autonomy, with the hope that this will enable the universities to diagnose problems facing the system and be able to find a lasting durable solution. Most countries in Africa embrace this idea of autonomy, but we need more scientific information for effective implementation of this policy in Nigeria to reduce pressures for standardization exerted by the National Universities Commission and other buffer bodies by governments.

Campus crises, militancy and conflict management; As unionism (Freedom of association) is a fundamental right of every worker, yet unionized staff militancy over salary issues has been a major destabilizing factor within the system in Nigeria. In similar vein, lots of disruptions have been witnessed through students' violence and campus violent cult crises. University is therefore facing the problem of how to demilitarize our campuses.

Research and innovation: While funding of scientific research can be obtained through different private and public sources, governments, especially in Nigeria, play a dominant role in funding university research, which private sector ignores for lack of commercial value. Whereas research grants to universities are on the increase elsewhere in the world, the flow of such funds has been impeded by certain procedural problems in Nigeria. While government was making apparent efforts to fund university research, high inflation rates in this period mopped up the increase. This trend led to gross inadequate funds for university research.

Financing: Nigerian governments have not been able to provide the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of enrolment expansion. By the end of the 1990s, university expenditure per student in Nigeria had fallen to \$360. In response, the government announced its decision in July 2000 to increase funding to \$970 per student and to encourage universities to generate an additional 10% of their recurrent budget from income-producing activities.

Apart from the above there are other challenges like the problem of recruiting the right and qualified teaching staff, retaining and rewarding the caliber of academic staff needed to sustain and improve both teaching and research, the problem of maintaining the infrastructure for research and teaching, and the problem of making sure that the investment in university education is used to the best effect

(Nwana, 2000).

Although there has been a political context that degraded the quality of higher education in Nigeria through the 90s, the government's inability to adequately fund higher education for current operations and address the deficits resulting from deferred maintenance results is serious barriers to measurable improvement. Which according to Okebukola (2003) can be summarized as:

(a) inadequate facilities to support educational excellence;

(b) the impoverishment of Nigeria's primary and secondary education systems which has resulted in many undergraduates arriving at university without basic technical, writing and scientific skills needed

for undergraduate study;

(c) state control of the university system that has dictated massification of higher education without allowing for filtering of learners coming into the university system, setting faculty wages at a level that will attract qualified instructors and researchers, and restructuring to attract new resources through tuition and fees.

Higher education, though could be very important in assisting people to get jobs and gainful employment, there still remain palpable barriers to this effect in the Nigerian context. The socio-economic connection, whilst always present, remains especially critical in a quickly globalizing economic market in which quality control and production according to strict specification can be crucial indeed. How do we remove these barriers and improve higher education in its totality in Nigeria?

First of all, it is very important for the Nigerian government to make significant progress in improving the quality and efficiency of secondary education prior to a focus on the higher education sector. Or still good enough, it could be pursued *pari passu*. Excellent examples of the socio-economic connection of basic education reside in Asia with the speedy use of opportunities of global market for the reduction of poverty. In Japan, the fundamental Code of Education issued in 1872, expressed the public commitment to make sure that there must be “no community with an illiterate family or a family with an illiterate person.” Thus, with the bridging of education barriers, began Japan’s remarkable history of rapid socio-economic growth. By 1910, Japan was almost fully literate at least for the young, and by 1913, Japan was publishing more books and twice more books than Britain and United States of America respectively, even though she was still very much poorer. (Wasser, 2001), The concentration on education determined, to a large extent, the nature and speed of Japan’s economic and social progress. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other Asian economies followed similar routes later in the second half of

the 20th century, with their visions firmly fixed on general expansion of education. It is our view that Nigeria can follow the trend of the Asian educational development to aspire to greater heights in the benefits of Higher Education. We can surely learn from history and thereafter remain committed, and be firmly focused for the times ahead.

The case of a World – Class University in Nigeria

The degrading state of education in Nigeria is becoming so alarming, which has made Nigerian universities not to be ranked among the first 5,000 Universities in the world and

among the first 40 in Africa (see www.webometrics.info/top100). One could also observe that with the trend of globalization as a trend that is engulfing the whole world, and which has become the panacea to many world problems, Nigeria needs a world-class university system, to accelerate her development and make her relevant in the new modernity and globalized ranking. One could reason therefore that an international competitive educational system is the first step in building an economy that will bring home the dividends of globalization to Nigeria, which other developing economies throughout the world have been enjoying. Thus there is the need for a genuine dialogue in terms of educational reform that will provide Nigerians with the skills needed to compete internationally. This reform should raise the level of knowledge capital to support an international society that has shed its colonial ties to agriculture and a sustenance social organization to sophisticated manufacturing and knowledge industries. World-class

universities are also necessary to incubate and support the development of local indigenous business. In spite of Nigeria's eroded higher education system, there is evidence of innovation and regional success. Although Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources and creativity, too many false starts and failed efforts to improve education and late entry into the race for globalization will put Nigerian society at a long-term disadvantage relative to other developing economies such as China and India

Higher Education for Global Information Network

Universities all over the world have the proud record of knowledge sharing that dates back to hundreds of years. In this respect, the academic world was a global phenomenon before the word "globalization" was coined. The global market place and the information technology (IT) revolution that fuels it simply accelerate a process already well under way. IT facilitates a free flow of research and expertise, making the best information simultaneously available in Port Elizabeth of South Africa, Sokoto of Nigeria and Los Angeles of the United States of America. In view of these constant and continuing developments in IT and new knowledge, a global electronic link serve should be established in each University, solely for campus usage. The main aim of these electronic connections should be for the purpose of networking, collaborative research, studies and fellowship amongst students, graduates and their teachers, all within the perimeters of their offices, common rooms or lounges. Such internet connectivity is now fully operational in a few of universities e.g. Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto, Ife and Lagos. This should be extended in more details to all the universities in the country. Apart from knowledge transfer, learning and training, such networks should get the students more focused academically and having less time for deviant-behaviors such as cultism.

Therefore, in order to be a full participant in the already unavoidable globalization, every effort should continue to be made to improve the status of higher education in Nigeria, so as to be able to admit and retain the services of talented and ambitious young men and women teaching in the system. The scope of higher education particularly University education should also be expanded to include a wide – spread use of multimedia technology in teaching. It has been observed that a lot of university teachers that teach today in Nigeria, do not know anything about computer. Many are unlikely to differentiate between a computer monitor and a television set, besides, many of them do not even understand what an e-mail means let alone sourcing for relevant information on the internet. How would a teacher then teach and be professionally functional in this age of globalization when the world at large has become a global village if the teacher is not well equipped with the knowledge of ICT? What is the teacher going to teach? How is he going to teach it? More so, he is expected to teach current research knowledge, how is he going to teach it when he/she is ICT illiterate?

Strategies and Recommendations towards Building a World – Class University in Nigeria.

We have established in this paper that challenges facing Nigerian higher education are enormous. Nigeria therefore needs to start with good, genuine and targeted policy to reform higher education. Reforms that will promote university autonomy that will give University governing councils the responsibility for institutional governance, the appointment of key officers restricting the powers of the National Universities Commission and allowing universities to set admissions criteria, select students, develop curricula and restore grant funding are very imperative.

To ensure an efficient higher education system that would deliver an effective educational service,

more strategic and symbiotic plans/objectives are considered central, and must be diligently pursued. This nine point strategy would enable the nation to achieve an overall goal of transforming the Higher Education sector. These are to:

- provide increased access to Higher Education and .to produce well-equipped graduates.
- provide entrepreneurship curriculum opportunities for students across all disciplines in Nigeria higher education.
- promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities by ensuring that students and staff profiles progressively reflect the demographic realities of the Nigerian Society.
- build new institutional and organizational identities through local, regional and international collaboration between different institutions.
- build high-level research and teaching capacities to address research and knowledge needs.
- create and facilitate global information networking within each campus and/ or adjoining campuses.
- promote and sustain self-sufficiency in funding via the fostering of a triple helix of “University – Industry Government” relations. This strategy would create more collateral partnerships and linkages with the middle of the helical structure as important stakeholders. That is, industries, business and communities, who benefit immensely from the university education. The universities should also derive mutual benefits from them, which could be inclusive of funding of research relevant to their practices or specialties.
- promote peace and security in the campus so as to ensure an enabling “education-friendly-environment” for easy teaching and learning.
- promote an active and vibrant “Parent – Teachers’ – Association. (PTA)

These strategic points, if successfully adopted, will be able to assist -in the lines of improved discipline, excellent cultural stability, awareness of negative effects of cultism and participatory funding. Why shouldn't an exemplary PTA. for example, support or foot a good research proposal, or finance a post-graduate scholarship? All these points are sine qua non for boosting excellence in teaching and research in the universities.

The universities themselves should plan to provide additional funding to promote excellence in teaching, to introduce new national professional standards for teaching and to provide better information on teaching standards to help students' choice and drive up the quality of education. It is a fact that there is a pandemic problem of under-funding in all our universities; however, this should not negate our drive to improve the quality of higher education. Naturally, it gets to a point when a son gets less dependent on the father. At this point in life, the son should source for its own needs and livelihood, and also fine-tune his spending requirements. The prevailing problem of funding can be minimized, if the seventh of the nine-point strategy, i.e. the triple helix of “University – Industry – Government” ‘relations is given close attention.

Since government is burdened by numerous national problems, the universities should be less fully

dependent on the Government. Each higher institution can pursue self-funding by; Promoting partnerships and linkages with all stakeholders-locally, regionally and internationally; ensuring the provision of functional advisory, extension and consultancy services on issues that are relevant to the socio-economic advancement of the university and the nation; and founding of a government – initiated – body to be known as Higher Education Funding of Nigeria (HEFON). The creation of HEFON should be in partnership with oil industries and other corporate bodies. The funding from such a body should aim to assist and build on linkages and to develop a more strategic and non-prescriptive approach to the use of funds. The line of usage of funds should be for the universities themselves to decide in the light of their own strategies, needs and assessments of local requirements. HEFON should be concerned with promoting partnerships between higher education and industries, with the transfer of knowledge and the encouragement of employability skills. We strongly believe that this should be an added core-activity for the universities, alongside teaching, research and community service. The program should be made to achieve systematic and sustainable change within institutions in the manner they relate to business: more rapid and effective transfer of new ideas, products and processes generated in higher education to business and industry; and better relationships between people in higher education and industry/business.

The success of such a program had been documented after its first year of operation in the June 2003 report of the Brazilian Embassy as put forward by Mondal (2006). This report confirmed that the United Kingdom (UK) and Brazilian academics benefited immensely from the opportunities of working more closely in international partnerships and linkages and had planned further activities for the future. The three Brazilian Universities were part of a larger program of nine priority research areas in the State of Rio de Janeiro which itself was part of a wider federal scheme. Two of these three were in engineering-related fields with strong links to the oil and gas industry in Rio, in particular, with the Brazilian oil company called Petrobras. These Brazilian research programs, in partnerships with consortia of UK Universities focused on important and related research areas such as industrial catalysis, corrosion protection (both primarily geared towards the oil and gas industries) and photo pharmaceuticals. So why can't a university or some universities in Nigeria and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) or Shell take a cue from this excellent example? Any of our universities can work out a feasible ideology or program which we have designated as "HEROIC" initiative meaning, that is, "Higher Education Reach Out to Industries and the Community." Each Nigerian university should pledge to introduce "Centers of Excellence" to celebrate excellent practices in teaching and research.

In boosting academic excellence in teaching and research in Higher Education in Nigeria, very high quality research should be well funded whilst keeping strictly to the saving "gown for town". The results of the research and teaching, its discoveries and new knowledge should be used for the improvement of "town" or community. Higher education efforts should cover both basic and applied research, which should be responsive to the felt needs and expectations of Nigeria as a nation.

Conclusion

The Nigeria of 21st century is facing a lot of problems with regard to national development. The present state of our country is such that there is economic depression, infrastructural decades and social disintegrations. The desire of Nigerians is that this country must wake up and move forward. The required ingredients (human and natural resources) to move the country forward are there in abundance, university education is one of the vehicles needed to help Nigeria move forward.

University education is a great asset, since its contributions in the 21st century to the economic and social well being of Nigeria is of great importance. Its research shall push back the frontiers of human knowledge and be the foundation of human progress. Its teaching shall educate and skill the nation for a knowledge-dominated 21st century. University education should give graduates both personal and intellectual fulfillment. The contributions of university education to national development in the 21st century are far reaching and so, we cannot afford the risk of decline.

For the universities to successfully face the challenges confronting them and make meaningful contributions to our National Development, the country needs an education-friendly government, a civil society and public sector that is ready and willing to invest in university education and give recognition to those who have chosen the path of knowledge industry. But then there is need for those in the universities to put their houses in order, thereby operating by examples, so that our would-be partners will be encouraged to join hands with us in facing the challenges of the 21st century for national development. It can therefore be concluded that the most sustainable way of meeting national objectives for international integration and prosperity is to invest in Nigerians through higher education, and the best starting point is through genuine reform of the underpinning policy systems constraining the Universities.

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