

# **Motionless Points in Chaos: Education Reforms, Innovations and the Challenges for Higher Education in Nigeria**

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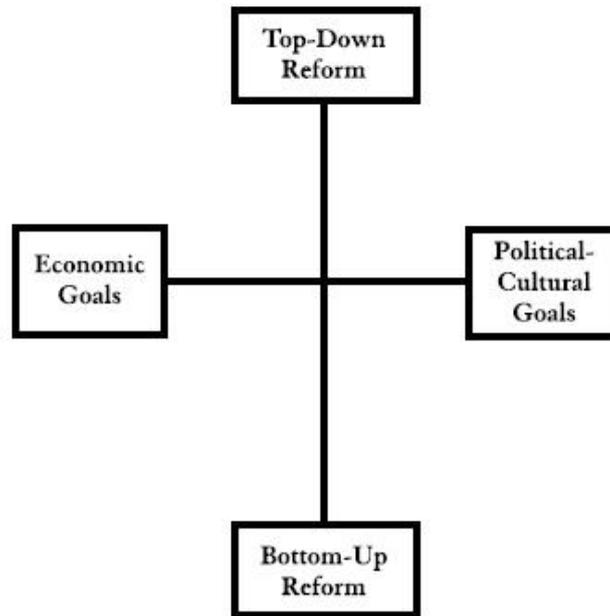
## **1. Introduction**

The agenda of educational reform all over the world is premised on the assumption that such reform is good and that it leads to an improvement in educational practices and process and subsequently, produces better citizens. Yet history shows clearly the political and economic nature of the forces that lead to a stampede in reforms. For instance, the massive curriculum reform movements in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s were based on a perceived lack of competition with the then Soviet Union which successfully launched the first artificial satellite in 1957. That triggered a wave of educational reforms, particularly in science, to ensure that the American secondary school student was equipped enough to take on the Soviets in the science and technology arena.

The curricular efforts in the United States – initiated by the Congress which established the National Science Foundation – triggered similar activity in the United Kingdom where a series of curricular revisions were advocated and carried out principally by science teachers under the funding initiative of the Nuffield Foundation. Rather expectedly, other moves followed around the world.

By the end of the decade to the 1990s, however, it was increasingly becoming clearer that such reform movements were either misconceived, poorly executed or were too ambitious in relation to the changing economic, political and social climates of the various communities around the world (Arnove 2005). With the increasing involvement of financial institutions in the educational reform processes of many developing countries, a newer conceptual framework for understanding the pattern of educational reforms at all levels begin to emerge. A framework developed by Rolland Paulston and Gregory LeRoy (1982) proves quite sufficient in enabling a categorization of such recent reforms. The framework consists of two principal axes—a vertical one, concerning where reform is initiated (whether at the top in international and national bureaucracies or at the bottom in grassroots movements), and a horizontal axis, concerning the goals of educational changes—varying between principal economic instrumental goals or sociocultural and political change (often associated with identity movements). The conceptual framework is captured in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Paulston and LeRoy’s review of the literature indicated that most programs fell in the upper left quadrant of Figure 1, and were designed to meet the so-called “manpower” or “human resource” requirements and the needs of dominant groups. Still, there were also a number of grassroots movements that viewed education as a catalyst for fundamental social changes.

## 2. Top-Down Impositions

Turning to the broader ambit of national systems of schooling around the world and attempts to initiate policies and practices that contribute to major improvements in the management, financing, content, processes, and outcomes of education, it is apparent, by looking at recent educational reforms at the national level in Nigeria, that the most common pattern has been one dominated by the neoliberal, economic, and educational agendas of the major international financial agencies. These agencies include the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as well as bilateral technical assistance agencies of North America, Europe, and Japan, and national governments, both conservative and liberal, that have bought into this agenda to secure needed external funds to stabilize their economies and pay off their tremendous debt burdens. As Arnove et al (2003:313, 324) argued,

This agenda derives from the work of the classical economists, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who believed that the role of the state consisted of establishing the conditions by which the free play of the marketplace, the laws of supply and demand, and free trade based on competitive advantage, would inevitably redound to the benefit of all.

The educational counterparts of these policies have included moves to decentralize and privatize public educational systems. The economic and educational “restructuring” that has occurred as an integral part of this agenda has led to a substantial diminution of the role of the state in the public financing of education, but not necessarily its control. It also led to the application of a market logic and business rhetoric to the goals of education, and the evaluation of the processes and outcomes of schooling, rather than the social utility or what has been called a logic of the majority.

Emphasis also has been placed on the efficiency of systems, not measured in relation to how effectively limited resources are optimized, but rather in relation to cutting costs by reducing inputs. The crass commercialization of education is evident in the heightened search for business sponsorships, niche markets, and the establishment of competitive reward systems for individuals and schools based on monies garnered.

Reforms aimed at privatizing and decentralizing education at all levels are promoted by influential business roundtables and industrial advisory councils to education, such as the Council for Business/Higher Education Cooperation in Australia (Berman et al 2003), as well as conservative think tanks, such as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute of Public Affairs, and the Centre for Independent Studies in Australia; the Hillgate Group and the Institute of Economic Affairs in England; and the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, and most recently the Brookings Institution, in the United States (Berman et al 2003). University economics departments, such as that of the University of Chicago, and related research and development departments or intellectual property offices also play active roles in promoting such reforms. These initiatives view education in terms of forming “human capital” and serving primarily the goals of economic productivity and global competitiveness (Berman et al 2003). Thus the recent innovations and reforms in Nigeria such as Education for All, Universal Basic Education at the national level, and the efforts of Unicef, USAID and other agencies at the local levels are all indications of how the economic models of educational development entrench themselves in Nigerian educational discourse.

### **3. Reform From Below: Grassroots Movements**

Against these top-down tendencies in educational policy, there are grass-roots movements all over the world that aim to raise a critical consciousness and equip individuals and their collectivities with the perspectives, skills, and knowledge to effect social change that meets their basic needs and most profound desires for a better life (Morrow and Torres 2003).

These social movements are often based on the need to confront global and national economic forces that are destroying natural environments and essential livelihoods (ibid). They open opportunities for women, indigenous people, and other historically discriminated-against populations to affirm their identities, make a decent living, and participate in the shaping of national policies that contribute to the democratization and development of their societies (ibid). Movements such as the popular education and science program Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad in

India affirm the value of traditional knowledge and how it can work with modern science and technology to improve the lives of destitute communities (Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy, 1994). Maternal language programs in Papua New Guinea, a country of approximately four million people and over 800 languages, engage communities in developing their own primary school and adult literacy materials based on local myths and oral traditions (Malone and Arnove 1998). Using relatively inexpensive desktop publishing equipment, John Hutchison and other scholars were able to produce in Mali, in only one year, seventy manuscripts, forty of which were published as books in various indigenous languages (Hutchinson 1993); one of these books was a translation of Ngûgi's *Decolonising the Mind* into Bamanankan.

#### **4. The Middle Space: State-NGO/Local-International Interactions**

If we examine the middle space where international actors, the state, and local communities meet, there are a number of initiatives aimed at substantially improving the content and methods of education that promise greater equity and quality, as well as efficiency (as measured by retention and graduation rates, and individuals equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society and to lead meaningful lives). There are worldwide movements that emphasize goals of education related to the formation of critical, participatory citizens in multicultural societies. Civic education programs are being introduced in a number of countries previously under totalitarian rule—or authoritarian regimes at best. The programs are based on constructivist epistemologies and methods that engage students in questioning the value of the existing rules of the game (Banks 2003). They further encourage students to envision more desirable futures and to take an active role in shaping the course of their societies.

Frequently, however, these curricula come up against the strong tendency of national systems of education to use such courses for purposes of political indoctrination. For example, Hong Kong illustrates the tension between “Chinese History” courses, whose curriculum is based on the experiences of the Chinese mainland, with an emphasis on traditional values and unproblematic pedagogy designed to integrate the former colony into the mainland society, and more general history courses that are designed locally and draw on international tendencies in this field to have more open-ended pedagogies involving the critical examination of major social issues (Kan and Vickers, 2002).

Tensions related to such reform efforts were highlighted at an international conference in Bellagio, Italy, in June 2002, where representatives from eighteen nations examined attempts to introduce notions of multicultural education and citizenship education into the curriculum (in Banks 2004). With regard to Japan, for example, Professor Murphy-Shigematsu underscored the difficulties of diversity education in a society where the motto has been “the nail that sticks out gets hammered in,” and where ethnic education (*minzoku kyoiku*) and education about the minority burakumin (*Dowa kyoku*, putative “untouchables”) have existed, but in isolation from the main curriculum. In Japan, as in several European countries, a low birth rate and the influx of immigrant workers are driving forces behind efforts to have a more inclusive education.

## 5. Globalization from Below

The forces of globalization that have intensified over the past decade challenge us to cope with transnational forces that appear to overwhelm and fragment our communities and set whole populations against one another. But the same mechanisms that enable multinational economic and cultural corporations to go wherever they want and do whatever is in their self-interests, which is invariably the bottom line, also can be used to unite people across previously insurmountable divides. Just as there is globalization from above, there is countervailing globalization from below—grassroots movements and the use of interactive technologies and media can unite people in common endeavors.

One example is the “No Sweat [Shop]” movement that unites university students and faculty and labor unions in the United States and abroad to press demands that multinational corporations pay their workers a living wage in a safe and secure environment and recognize the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively free from the threat of losing their rights to sell goods displaying university logos. International social movements also have achieved victories related to the distribution of free or low-cost antiretroviral medicines for AIDS patients in countries devastated by the disease, such as South Africa, and they have stopped the wholesale firing of union workers who refused to accept cutbacks in wages, working conditions, and benefits. Furthermore, they have forced major agenda setters in education to talk about putting a human face on globalization (Brecher et al, 2000).

## 6. Reforms and Higher Education in Nigeria

The most visible aspect of the recent Nigerian education reforms was in higher education. And although the anticipated Tertiary Consolidation innovation has been scrapped, it is my intention to look at why it would not have worked in the first instance. Therefore, this article will focus on the educational reforms of the Nigerian government and how it relates to current realities.

The Nigerian University education, patterned after the “gold standard” of British colonial universities remains the main highway to white collar jobs and social security for millions of young Nigerians. The greatest challenge faced by the Nigerian university in the years after independence from Britain was whether to retain its British legacy — the *gold standard* of Lord Ashby of Brandon (Ashby 1965:82) — or open itself to other influences — as is the case with universities all over the world — and gradually evolve a distinct character of its own.

The desire to retain the British framework predominated quite simply because the Nigerian labor market — civil service, private sector and the industries — has not developed a system of assessing prospective employees except through their education and examination outcomes. And since the entire employment superstructure is based on British patterns, retaining British educational framework had the comfortable currency of predictability. An almost paternally condescending relationship between Nigeria and Britain also helps to retain Nigeria within the

British ambit for a considerable period after independence.

However, a series of political events in the 1970s all the way to 1980s served to turn Nigeria increasingly away from British political and economic influence. Nigerian leaders then decided to also sever any educational influence of Britain on the country. The end product was a total re-orientation of Nigerian education to American models, leading to the establishment of the 6-3-3-4 educational systems in 1976. Yet this was done without considering the evolutionary pathways of the American model of education and its structural demands. By the time the 6-3-3-4 educational system matured in 1988, coupled with severe economic depression in the country, it was clear that the biggest challenge to Nigerian higher education was its own structure. Thus by the 1990s the picture of higher education in Nigeria as a comfortable meal-ticket started to get fuzzy and a series of factors combined to create a crisis of confidence in the quality of higher education in the country. The dwindling economy led to massive brain-drain and the dilapidation of facilities and resources in the universities. Under these circumstances, the Nigerian university community lost motivation and became demoralized. Additional inter-related factors that exacerbated the situation included:

- absence of clearly defined career development profiles for academic and support staff;
- widespread teaching overloads under poor working conditions;
- lack of clear-cut, objective criteria for promotion;
- lack of research facilities;
- inadequate office space for staff;
- student unrest and lack of discipline.

However, the major problem facing almost all developed and certainly all developing countries is the basic dilemma that arises from continued high social and individual demand for access to various forms of studies and educational services at a time of growing constraints on public budgets. This situation is nowadays a principal source of strained relations between the State on the one hand and higher education institutions and the academic community on the other. Higher education has to show that it can compete with other organized interests for financial attention from public funding sources.

The main criterion for evaluating the functioning of higher education is the quality of teaching, training, research and service to the community. Therefore, it is important not to confuse the liberalization of economic relations and the need to promote an 'entrepreneurial spirit' with the absence of public social policies, in particular in relation to the financing of higher education. Nor should the granting of institutional autonomy be interpreted as a policy alternative to force institutions to raise their own funds - either by excessively introducing commercial courses or by raising tuition fees and other study-related charges.

## **7. The Main Challenges for Nigerian Higher Education in the 21st Century**

Having looked at the broad challenges, let me now focus attention on the specific details. The purpose of higher education in Nigeria should be to:

- provide increasing numbers of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with specialized skills – specialists are increasingly in demand in all sectors of the world economy.
- produce a body of students with a general education that encourages flexibility and innovation – allowing the continual renewal of economic and social structures relevant to a fast-changing world.
- teach students not just what is known now, but also how to keep their knowledge up-to-date, so that they are able to refresh their skills as the economic environment changes.
- increase the amount and quality of in-country research – allowing Nigeria to select, absorb, and create new knowledge more efficiently and rapidly than is currently the case.

These broad goals pose the main challenges to quality higher education in the country. Let us look at the source of these challenges.

### ***7.1 Enrolment Pressure and Higher Education Challenge***

Many studies had been carried out at both undergraduate and post graduate levels on the success or otherwise of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program launched in 1996 and clearly show that the products of the system were those that filtered their way to the nation's higher education systems by the end of the 1990s. The massive projections and preparations made for the success of the UPE was not sustained at higher levels. In other words, and possibly under the pressure of development aid partners, most of the planning was at the lower level of education, without corresponding expansion in facilities at the higher level to accommodate the anticipated massive influx of students from the UPE program. The end product was a massive demand for shrinking places at universities in the late 1990s. A snapshot of the application/admission ratio of higher education from 1990-1994 is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Admission in Universities (1990 – 1994)**

| State          | Application/Adm | Application/Adm | Application/Adm | Application/Adm |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                | 1990/91         | 1991/92         | 1992/93         | 1993/94         |
| Delta/Edo      | 42,259(6,790)   | 61,780(8,756)   | 55,780(8,542)   | 73,137(9,866)   |
| Abia/Imo       | 33,337(5,938)   | 53,982(7,409)   | 49,156(8,009)   | 60,957(8,908)   |
| Anambra/Enugu  | 29,281(4,917)   | 43,443(6,887)   | 49,156(8,009)   | 60,957(8,908)   |
| Oyo/Osun       | 36,683(5,037)   | 44,098(5,692)   | 33,986(4,139)   | 45,281(6,472)   |
| Ondo           | 22,546(2,810)   | 30,027(4,196)   | 26,048(3,967)   | 33,299(4,871)   |
| Ogun           | 22,086(4,147)   | 30,748(3,781)   | 28,733(3,468)   | 2,441(4,462)    |
| Kwara/Kogi     | 18,153(2,746)   | 21,596(2,736)   | 21,512(3,989)   | 25,299(3,633)   |
| Rivers         | 13,969(2,686)   | 21,811(2,401)   | 21,820(3,932)   | 25,391(4,836)   |
| Lagos          | 14,175(2,936)   | 15,622(2,247)   | 15,820(2,182)   | 18,290(2,839)   |
| Benue          | 9,724(1,527)    | N/A             | N/A             | N/A             |
| Akwa Ibom      | 10,068(1,334)   | 15,803(1,828)   | 13,583(1,380)   | 16,713(1,538)   |
| Kano/Jigawa    | 3,196(86)       | 5,811(1,334)    | 5,130(1,380)    | 4,804(1,244)    |
| Plateau        | 4,151(840)      | 5,850(1,324)    | 5,490(1,154)    | 4,982(616)      |
| Cross River    | 5,974(972)      | 895(1,081)      | 7,590(1,077)    | 8,342(1,171)    |
| Kaduna         | 4,607(707)      | 4,541(1,105)    | 3,645(804)      | 3,399(702)      |
| Adamawa/Taraba | 2,944(541)      | 3,807(1,120)    | 3,811(912)      | 3,728(857)      |
| Borno/Yobe     | 2,628(463)      | 436(130)        | 3,121(783)      | 2,891(697)      |
| Niger          | 2,870(573)      | 3,542(1,032)    | 3,121(783)      | 2,891(697)      |
| Sokoto/Kebbi   | 2,437(487)      | 842(185)        | 2,349(865)      | 2,288(917)      |
| Bauchi         | 2,033(366)      | 2,621(717)      | 2,980(716)      | 2,518(476)      |
| Katsina        | 900(155)        | 1,456(396)      | 1,303(349)      | 1,065(295)      |

Source (Igbo 1997:209)

As can be seen from the table, it is clear that the admission of students is far below the number of applicants. The question to ask is, what should those not admitted do? This is further exacerbated by the actual admissions in subsequent years, such as in 2001 as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Nigerian university admissions, 2001**

| S/N | Universities                 | Admissions |      |     |       |     |       |
|-----|------------------------------|------------|------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
|     |                              | T          | *%   | M   | **%   | F   | **%   |
| 1.  | Igbinedion Univ.Okada Benin  | 7          | 0.01 | 5   | 71.43 | 2   | 28.57 |
| 2.  | Babcock Univ.Ilisan-Remo     | 18         | 0.04 | 6   | 33.33 | 12  | 66.67 |
| 3.  | Madonna Univ.Okija           | 27         | 0.05 | 18  | 66.67 | 9   | 33.33 |
| 4.  | Ladoke University of Tech.   | 31         | 0.06 | 28  | 90.32 | 3   | 9.68  |
| 5.  | University of Agric. Makurdi | 37         | 0.07 | 32  | 86.49 | 5   | 13.51 |
| 6.  | Alvan Ikoku Coll. of Educ.   | 46         | 0.09 | 17  | 36.96 | 29  | 63.04 |
| 7.  | Univ of Agric. Abeokuta      | 171        | 0.34 | 101 | 59.06 | 70  | 40.94 |
| 8.  | Edo State University         | 173        | 0.34 | 127 | 73.41 | 46  | 26.59 |
| 9.  | Kano State University        | 194        | 0.39 | 118 | 60.82 | 76  | 39.18 |
| 10. | Fed University of Tech. Yola | 218        | 0.43 | 159 | 72.94 | 59  | 27.06 |
| 11. | Bayero University Kano       | 220        | 0.44 | 177 | 80.45 | 43  | 19.55 |
| 12. | Adeyemi Coll. of Educ.       | 324        | 0.64 | 139 | 42.90 | 185 | 57.10 |

| S/N | Universities                     | Admissions |       |       |       |       |       |
|-----|----------------------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|     |                                  | T          | *%    | M     | **%   | F     | **%   |
| 13. | Fed Univers. of Agric.Umudike    | 338        | 0.67  | 181   | 53.55 | 157   | 46.45 |
| 14. | Kogi State University            | 346        | 0.69  | 192   | 55.49 | 154   | 44.51 |
| 15. | Coll.of EDU.Port/Harcourt        | 404        | 0.80  | 185   | 45.79 | 219   | 54.21 |
| 16. | University of Ado-Ekiti.         | 410        | 0.82  | 291   | 70.98 | 119   | 29.02 |
| 17. | Ondo State University            | 432        | 0.86  | 267   | 61.81 | 165   | 38.19 |
| 18. | Ebonyi State University          | 524        | 1.04  | 301   | 57.44 | 223   | 42.56 |
| 19. | Benue State University           | 548        | 1.09  | 358   | 65.33 | 190   | 34.67 |
| 20. | Obafemi Awolowo University       | 653        | 1.30  | 457   | 69.98 | 196   | 30.02 |
| 21. | University of Ilorin             | 683        | 1.36  | 517   | 75.70 | 166   | 24.30 |
| 22. | Anambra Univ.of Tech.Uli         | 718        | 1.43  | 412   | 57.38 | 306   | 42.62 |
| 23. | University of Abuja              | 791        | 1.57  | 427   | 53.98 | 364   | 46.02 |
| 24. | Ogun State University            | 817        | 1.62  | 479   | 58.63 | 338   | 41.37 |
| 25. | University of Ibadan             | 874        | 1.74  | 613   | 70.14 | 261   | 29.86 |
| 26. | Fed University of Tech. Akure    | 953        | 1.90  | 770   | 80.80 | 183   | 19.20 |
| 27. | University of Uyo                | 956        | 1.90  | 605   | 63.28 | 351   | 36.72 |
| 28. | A/Tafawa Balewa University       | 980        | 1.95  | 767   | 78.27 | 213   | 21.73 |
| 29. | Fed University of Tech. Minna    | 1001       | 1.99  | 795   | 79.42 | 206   | 20.58 |
| 30. | Usmanu Danfodio University       | 1124       | 2.24  | 886   | 78.83 | 238   | 21.17 |
| 31. | Imo State University             | 1170       | 2.33  | 595   | 50.85 | 575   | 49.16 |
| 32. | Enugu State University of Tech.  | 1178       | 2.34  | 690   | 58.57 | 488   | 41.43 |
| 33. | University of Jos                | 1286       | 2.56  | 813   | 63.22 | 473   | 36.78 |
| 34. | University of Maiduguri          | 1425       | 2.83  | 887   | 62.25 | 538   | 37.75 |
| 35. | Lagos State University           | 1499       | 2.98  | 889   | 59.31 | 610   | 40.69 |
| 36. | Delta State University           | 1507       | 3.00  | 803   | 53.28 | 704   | 46.72 |
| 37. | Rivers State University of Tech. | 1753       | 3.49  | 999   | 56.99 | 754   | 43.01 |
| 38. | University of P/Harcourt         | 1869       | 3.72  | 1109  | 59.34 | 760   | 40.66 |
| 39. | University of Calabar            | 1873       | 3.73  | 1119  | 59.74 | 754   | 40.26 |
| 40. | Ahmadu Bello University          | 2080       | 4.14  | 1495  | 11.88 | 585   | 28.12 |
| 41. | Fed University of Tech. Owerri   | 2711       | 5.39  | 2090  | 77.09 | 621   | 22.91 |
| 42. | ABIA State University            | 2726       | 5.42  | 1368  | 50.18 | 1358  | 49.82 |
| 43. | University of Benin              | 2772       | 5.51  | 1927  | 69.52 | 845   | 30.48 |
| 44. | Nnamdi Azikiwe University        | 3444       | 6.85  | 1827  | 53.05 | 1617  | 46.95 |
| 45. | University of Lagos              | 3874       | 7.71  | 2338  | 60.35 | 1536  | 39.65 |
| 46. | University of Nigeria            | 5092       | 10.13 | 2892  | 56.79 | 2200  | 43.21 |
| 47. | Total                            | 50277      | 100   | 31271 | 62.20 | 19006 | 37.80 |

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (2001b)

\* = % of the total Applications/Admissions to an institution to the total number of Applications/Admissions for academic year.

\*\* = % of the total Applications/Admissions to the total number that Applied/Admitted to a given institution for Applications

M = Number of male students

F = Number of female students

T = Total number of students

Of the 46 universities in the country, only three admitted more than 50% of the students who applied; and even then, three of them are degree-awarding Colleges of Education, and the last one

is a private university (Babcock University, Ilesha-Remo) with only 18 applicants. The university with the highest applications, University of Nigeria, was able to admit only 43.21% of the applicants.

Similarly, a total of seven hundred and seventy-five thousand, nine hundred (775,900) candidates completed and returned application forms for the 2001 Universities Matriculation Examination. Out of this number, twelve thousand, eight hundred and forty-three (12,843) candidates did not turn up for the examination at their various centers across the country. The sum total of all those who sat for the examination therefore is seven hundred and sixty-three thousand and fifty-seven (763,057). Their distribution is shown according to the six highest and lowest number of applications per State in Table 3.

**Table 3: 2001 UME Applications – Highest and Lowest States**

| <b>Highest</b> |                   | <b>Lowest</b> |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <b>State</b>   | <b>Applicants</b> | <b>State</b>  | <b>Applicants</b> |
| Imo            | 78,495            | Borno         | 3,076             |
| Delta          | 66,211            | Katsina       | 2,449             |
| Anambra        | 56,159            | Kebbi         | 2,190             |
| Edo            | 54,368            | Taraba        | 2,149             |
| Ogun           | 50,101            | Yobe          | 1,330             |
| Ondo           | 37,346            | Zamfara       | 523               |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>342,680</b>    | <b>Total</b>  | <b>11,717</b>     |

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)(2001a)

Thus the total number of applicants from the lowest six States in the federation, all located in the north, was not even one third of the total number of applications from the State with the least applicants from the six southern states with the highest applications.

It is clear that demography is the biggest challenge facing Nigerian higher education. This has implications for expansion of provisions in the universities – which, in turn, has implications for funding. It is not enough to host a growing number of young people in different institutions. One must also offer them appropriate training which gives them access to the labor market and then ensures them a constant updating of their knowledge. Pertinence is a dynamic concept which differs according to the public and is the result of a dialogue and consultation between all the partners, including the students.

## **7.2 Fiscal Challenges and Nigerian Higher Education**

A second major challenge facing Nigerian higher education is the financing process, which is universal to higher education around the world. Indeed as indicated by the World Bank,

A dominant theme of higher education in the 1990s has been financial distress-the principal (although not the sole) condition underlying the World Bank’s declaration in 1994 that higher education was “in crisis throughout the world.” (Johnstone 1988: 4).

Johnstone (1988) contends further that four major factors affect the financing of higher education contribute to this pervasive condition of austerity. The first is enrollment pressure, especially in those countries combining growing populations of secondary school leavers with low current higher educational participation rates and inadequate higher educational capacity to meet the growing demand. A second cause is the tendency of unit costs in higher education to rise faster than unit costs in the overall economy, a tendency accelerated by the very rapidly increasing costs of technology and by the rapid change in the fields of study in greatest need and/or demand.

The third cause of higher education's pervasive condition of austerity in most of the world, including the industrialized countries, is the increasing scarcity of public revenue. This scarcity, in turn, is a function, in turn, of three principal causes: (a) budget constraints being faced by governments all over the world, (b) competition from other public needs (like basic education, public infrastructure, health, the maintenance of public order, environmental stabilization and restoration, and addressing the needs of the poor), and (c) the inability of many countries to rely on former methods of raising public revenues, such as turnover taxes on state-owned enterprises.

A fourth factor behind the growing public sector austerity in so many countries is essentially political. It is the growing dissatisfaction in many countries with the rigidities and inefficiencies of the public sector in general, and a corresponding drift toward market solutions, including privatization, deregulation, and the decentralization of functions still considered "public".

When these factors are combined with the increasing demands for places in higher education as a result of the mass education policy, clearly a bigger challenge for quality of the instruction given to students is posed. It is in order to meet these fiscal challenges that universities started to commercialize their programs – at the expense of the quality of instruction.

### **7.3 Government Regulation and Control**

Another challenge facing Nigerian universities is the issue of regulation and control, which in turn affects the autonomy of the systems, and the role of external aid agencies in ensuring the stability of the systems.

The Nigerian Universities Commission became much more powerful with the country's worsening economic situation in the mid-1980s. The public universities were forced to expend all of their discretionary funds held over from the period of prosperity. A 1985 decree of the Federal Military Government gave the Nigerian Universities Commission powers to set minimum academic requirements and by 1988 it had formulated an ambitious plan for "rationalizing" the undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered by the 37 federal and state universities which now enroll about a quarter of a million students.<sup>1</sup> To discharge its new responsibilities for university planning, budgeting and accreditation, the Nigerian Universities Commission has

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<sup>1</sup> For full details of the process of the resistance, see Bako, S. (1990), "Education Adjustment in Africa: The Conditionality and Resistance Against the World Bank Loan for Nigerian Universities," Paper presented to CODESRIA Symposium on Academic Freedom and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual in Africa, 26-29 November, Kampala, Uganda.

tipped its staff since 1988. A 1990 World Bank loan provided the Nigerian Universities Commission with foreign exchange for staff development, purchase of library materials, laboratory equipment and consumables to be allocated to the federal universities on a discretionary basis if they adhered to its norms and directives requiring the abolition of programs, staff retrenchment and the introduction of cost recovery measures. The loan, small in comparison to the funding that will be needed to rehabilitate Nigeria's universities, sparked widespread protest from the academic community that has still not subsided. So far, only about a third of the federal universities have complied with the least stringent cost and efficiency criteria which all institutions were predicted to be able to comply with.

Through expanding the powers of the Nigerian Universities Commission, the federal government has been able to obtain greater academic and financial control over the university system, reversing a process of devolution that gave the states increasing responsibility for higher as well as primary and secondary education, and still has not succeeded in enticing many universities to change their behaviors. Part of the explanation is that public universities tend to become less rather than more efficient as the resources to support them diminish. This is particularly likely to happen when universities lose both academic and financial autonomy and, thus, lack the flexibility they need to implement controversial reforms.

There are several lessons that can be drawn from these cases. First, governments cannot exercise effective direction of higher education systems unless the mechanisms of control are linked to the financing of institutions and/or their students. The costs of controlling a higher education system like Brazil's with a large private higher sector may be unaffordable, requiring governments to be selective about the domains of training, level of instruction, or kinds of institutions they wish to influence. Second, powers to manipulate the behavior of institutions must be reinforced by the availability of discretionary funding. However, third, as the experience of Nigeria suggests, incentives will not be successful unless the universities have the autonomy to reform themselves (Holm-Nielsen and Eisemon, 1995).

The subsequent picture of Nigerian university systems therefore becomes one of struggle between government forces on the one hand and academics on the other, with each claiming a greater share of the responsibility for ensuring the quality of education in the countries' universities. However, since funding remains the key critical factor in ensuring quality of education, and since the government controls the funding process, the challenge for fiscal diversification is brought to bear on the universities to ensure their survival. Many universities respond by introducing commercial programs that are targeted at fulfilling the thirst for qualification, not quality of education. The end product is over-crowded classrooms and over-utilized limited resources.

#### ***7.4 Challenges of Globalization and the Knowledge-based Economy***

A parallel and related development has been the changing structure of the economy: output growth, employment, and productivity gains have caused a shift away from the more traditional administrative and civil service jobs toward jobs requiring higher knowledge, a service versus

product orientation, vertical management strategies and information technology.

The phenomenon of structural change in the economy over the past 20 years has been referred to, sometimes very imprecisely, by a variety of often confusing terms: new (world) economy, global economy, information age, hi-tech economy, and knowledge economy.

The rapid development of industrializing economies in Asia and new information technologies have contributed to the emergence of a truly global economy in the last ten years. A global economy is not a world economy. Neither is it an economy where trade, investment, and resource exploitation take place worldwide. It is not even an economy where the external sector is dominant. For example, neither the U.S. nor the bloc of Western European countries (taken as a whole unit) shows foreign trade as a major part of their economic activity. A global economy is one whose strategic, core activities, including innovation, finance and corporate management, function on a planetary scale on real time (Carnoy et. al., 1993). And this globality became possible only recently because of the technological infrastructure provided by telecommunications, information systems, microelectronics machinery, and computer-based transportation. Today, as distinct from even a generation ago, capital, technology, management, information, and core markets are globalized.

University education plays a crucial role in technology transfer and development at two levels: (a) It has the capability to develop the production and management skills required to utilize and organize the new technology; therefore, university education is important to the technology transfer process in those industries that use and produce information technology; (b) With the spread of science-based industries, the university is the site that can combine the basic research needed for the advance of such industries with the training of researchers and applications of research for industry.

In almost all societies, universities' institutional role was defined in an earlier historical context. And in many, if not most societies, universities were organized around elite formation rather than the production of new knowledge. This means that the discourse in most nations' universities has centered on state power and the kind of knowledge that serves to "produce" and obtain political power in state bureaucracies. Castells (1992), for one, suggests that such "politicization" of universities is inherently inconsistent with the kinds of knowledge production activities needed to complement the development of an information economy.

Some countries' university systems did develop along another model, one where universities became centers of research aimed at developing new technologies for improving agricultural and industrial output. Notably, in Germany and in the United States universities became closely linked with particular industries-chemicals in Germany and agriculture in the U.S. Most important, this German-U.S. university model served in those countries to unify research and teaching in one institution, linking the two into a state-financed innovation training system that not only produced innovations with consequences for the economy, but also highly trained individuals that could be employed by productive enterprises to produce innovations in the industrial sector.

In most already industrialized countries and those developing countries well along in their industrialization, this has not been the traditional role of the university (Ben-David, 1977); nor, perhaps, is it a “natural” role: “Far from being a natural match, research and teaching can be organized within a single framework only under specific circumstances” (Ben-David, 1977:94, cited in Schwartzman, 1984:199-200). Scientific and technological development has, in many countries, taken place largely outside universities in firms and specialized research institutes, while universities have provided professional training, often not basing the training on scientific research (Schwartzman, 1984).

These difficulties are compounded by the globalization of innovation in an increasingly knowledge/science-based global economy. On the one hand, national states are the main investors and managers of the education and training of future researchers and technological problem-solvers/innovators, down to creating a “problem-solving, innovative” culture through the public education system. Most recently this responsibility has been defined in terms of national competitiveness to rationalize higher levels of spending on education. It can be argued that short of such nationalistic policies, there will be under-investment in human capital and therefore in the necessary prerequisites for worldwide innovation (Reich, 1991). Further, state policies in the name of national competitiveness are also needed to develop the research-training university called for by Castells to promote national innovation systems consistent with globalized high tech production (Castells, 1992; see also, Carnoy et al, 1992)

More effort is needed on choosing technologies that meet people’s need. For example future learning will continue to be web and learner-centric. The long-term implication of the web to African higher education in terms of cost, and operational issues should be understood. There is also a need for research on ICT policies that bring about faster changes in ICT introduction to higher education. Goals must be set for a minimum IT infrastructure for higher education institutions. A minimum level of connectivity is a pre-requisite for all higher education institutions. In addition there is a need for ongoing investigation on:

- Best strategies to align ICT in the higher education reform process
- Relationships between knowledge flow through ICTs and economic growth in order to foster policy making in the area of educational connectivity
- The role of ICTs in mitigating structural problems in higher education including funding, access, quality, competition, intellectual property rights, learning outcomes, governance and relevance.

## **8. Nigerian Education Sector Reforms**

Right in the middle of these challenges facing higher education the Nigerian Government introduced a whole range of Education sector reforms from 2007 aimed at achieving a significant gain in the implementation of World Bank policies on Nigerian education. The legal instrument for the institutionalization of these reforms was a proposed Education Reform Act (Draft), 2007.

The reforms cut across the swathe of education from pre-primary, encompassing Universal Basic Education all the way to the university. The details of each of these sectoral reforms are:

***ORASS (Operation Reach All Secondary Schools)***

ORASS was the first condition survey conducted by the Ministry of Education since its inception. 11,000 inspectors visited and inspected 14,543 secondary schools.

***Adopt-A-Public-School***

The Adopt-A-Public-School initiative aims to leverage stakeholders in education, particularly corporate organizations, to come together as partners, for the purpose of rescuing our public schools; and consequently restore them to institutions capable of delivering sound learning and aptitudinal education.

***CATI***

The Community Accountability & Transparency Initiative (CATI) seeks to get various institutions, civil society groups, town unions, etc involved in holding UBEC, SUBEBs, Contractors and the various Ministries of Education accountable for Government disbursements at all tiers.

***IEI (Innovation Enterprise Institutions)***

To advance Nigerian's economic growth through the maximization of human potential through excellence in vocational and technological training so as to develop the workforce and enhance Nigeria's global competitiveness.

***Unity School PPP***

The PPP initiative will ensure the effectiveness of the Federal Governments Unity Schools by bringing together various stakeholders in the Education system to deliver innovative solutions to the problems of poor school management, academic under-achievement and poor utilization of public financial resources.

***ORAPS (Operation Reach all Primary Schools)***

ORAPS is a follow up to ORASS (Operation Reach all secondary Schools), successfully carried out over the last quarter of 2006. ORAPS is an exercise geared towards doing both qualitative and quantitative inspection of all primary schools in Nigeria.

***Ed.Tap***

The ed.Tap initiative Tracks the "products" of Nigeria's educational system to determine who they are, their backgrounds, capabilities and needs to inform a long-term strategic planning process for the education sector.

### ***Tertiary Consolidation***

The consolidation initiative will deliver the conversion all Federal Polytechnics and Colleges of Education into campuses of neighboring Federal Universities, thus improving the carrying capacity of the Universities, and satisfying the quest for University Education and degree certification.

## **9. The Consolidation of Tertiary Education**

The discussion so far has been limited to universities. With the introduction of these sectoral reforms, the scope has to be expanded to include Federal Colleges of Education and Polytechnics. The main rationale given for the consolidation of the Federal tertiary sector is to

The consolidation initiative will deliver the conversion all Federal Polytechnics and Colleges of Education into campuses of neighboring Federal Universities, thus improving the carrying capacity of the Universities, and satisfying the quest for University Education and degree certification.(FME 2007: 4).

The Education Reform Act (Draft) also prescribes the establishment of Tertiary Education Regulatory Commission which replaces the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). According to the Act,

**24.** From the commencement of this Act, the 21 Federal Polytechnics (except the Yaba College of Technology and Kaduna Polytechnic which shall become ‘City Universities’) and the 20 Federal Colleges of Education shall be converted into campuses of neighboring universities as may be directed by an order issued by the Minister and published in the *gazette*.

### ***Purpose clause***

**25.** The purposes of this Part of this Act are to –

- a. to merge the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) into one body to be known as Tertiary Education Commission which shall be charged with the responsibility of regulating all Federal Government owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria;
- b. to strengthen the Tertiary Education Commission to enable the body to promote research and development in support of the industry in Nigeria;
- c. improve on the carrying capacity of the universities, particularly given their

- inability to accommodate a vast number of applicants;
- d. to eliminate the desperate desire for University education as against other tertiary institutions;
  - e. to eliminate the perception that certain tertiary institutions are superior to others;
  - f. to reduce huge overhead cost by consolidating the supervisory agencies (National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education and National Commission for Colleges of Education); the Boards of the three Parastatals and 37 Governing Councils, Chief Executives, Registrars and other principal officers;
  - g. to improve funding to universities in the area of infrastructural and instructional facilities, research, scholarly publications and staff training and development through the consolidation of Education Tax Fund intervention; and
  - h. to facilitate the creative use of underutilized physical assets by converting under-populated tertiary institutions into campuses of Innovative Enterprise Institutes (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007: 17-18).

The Federal Ministry of Education also lists a series of precedents to the consolidation, pointing out that it is nothing new. For instance,

- The idea builds on a familiar historical tradition in Nigeria. Some universities started as campuses of other universities: UI (London), Jos and Ilorin (UI), BUK, ATBU (ABU), FUTY (Unimaid), Calabar (UNN) etc.
- Some universities presently operate multiple campuses located in:
  1. same city i.e. the ABU campuses at Congo and Samaru; or
  2. Other cities within a reasonable distance such as the two UNN campuses at Enugu and Nsukka
- As Advanced Teachers' Colleges (ATCs), some of the COEs started as campuses of neighbouring universities e.g. ATC/ABU Kano and ATC/ABU Zaria. Today COE Zaria and the Congo Campus of ABU are only separated by a street. So too is COE Kano which is directly opposite the main gate of the city campus of BUK.
- A number of Polytechnics and COEs are presently awarding degrees by affiliation. Until recently, some COEs (both Federal and State) were in fact awarding their NCEs by affiliation. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007: 5-6).

## 10. Critique

That there is an urgent need for education reforms in Nigeria is not in question. However, a reform is a long process that begins with problem identification, study and analysis, and ends with the evaluation and continuation or termination of the program. It involves, among other things, the development of policy alternatives, experimentation implementation, and feedback. However, the attempts to reform the Nigerian tertiary education sector in 2007 were clearly not based on

collective, participatory grounds; the process was devised to give legitimacy to already predetermined reform packages. They are based on a top-down approach to policy making. The reforms were handed out from above; the above being either the Federal government, without consultation, or other advisory financial agencies.

It is very clear from the documents of the FME on the Tertiary Consolidation plan that there are issues to be revolved if the consolidation is to be successful. In the first instance, there were no wider consultations from academic Boards or senates of the institutions to be affected by the consolidation. This reinforces the view that democratization of education is merely a lip-service and is not followed by engagement and consultation.

Secondly, a reverse logic seems to be at play here. The creation of the University of Jos, for instance, gives the new university considerable latitude in serving its immediate environment, rather than being attached to the University of Ibadan. On its own, University of Jos can create a series of programs that otherwise would not have been possible under the tutelage of the University of Ibadan. By merging institutions such as FCOEs and Polytechnics to nearby universities, the gains made by the individual FCOEs and Polytechnics in providing vital community education would be lost in the new era of rationalization. This is because if the combined programs of the three categories of institutions were merged, then clearly some will have to be closed down – leading to staff loss on the charges of duplication.

An extension of this reverse logic is the inherent contradiction in the rationale given for the consolidation. For instance, the Reform Act says that the advantages of the consolidation include (amongst others):

- a. to eliminate the desperate desire for University education as against other tertiary institutions;
- b. to eliminate the perception that certain tertiary institutions are superior to others (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007: 3).

Yet if the FCOEs and Polytechnics are merged to universities, then there would not be any “other tertiary institution” – thus indeed *reinforcing* the view that the university is superior, because it is *only* the university that the Federal government recognizes – having eliminated other tertiary institutions. Nowhere in the Reform Act are facilities provided for the recognition of the FCOEs and Polytechnics – since even the regulatory bodies for these institutions have been “consolidated” into a new Tertiary Education Commission. Even the name of the new commission contradicts its provision. The use of tertiary in any educational discourse refers to a whole spectrum of provisions of education not restricted to universities. Yet under the new dispensation, only universities exist; so why call the commission Tertiary, instead of University Education Commission.

Further, it is not clear how the consolidation is expected to “eliminate the desperate desire for university education” since according to the FME statistics, more and more students apply to universities than other sectors of tertiary education. Creating “super universities” merely places

more emphasis on university education – for the State COEs and Polytechnics are likely to be deserted.

Also basing the logic of consolidation on an antecedent merger of previously independent units is faulty because the rationale for creating the independence units in the first place was to serve their localities in a distributed way.

Neglected in the current emphasis of policymakers' roles in educational systems, serving primarily the economic goal of national competitiveness in the global marketplace, is the fundamental and historic mission of public schooling in contributing to the formation of an enlightened and participatory citizenry that would actively forge a more democratic and equitable society. Progressive educators and statesmen over the past two centuries have also envisioned public education contributing to the struggles of populations and countries all around the world for self-determination and justice.

Thus it is clear that Nigerian university structures face a lot of challenges in a developing economy. These challenges – demographic, financial, academic – will determine the quality of Nigerian university graduates in the future. Consequently, in addition to critical analysis of current worldwide trends in economic and educational policies, it is necessary to stimulate the imaginations of teachers, students, and policymakers, with reference to alternative and preferable futures consistent with ideals of democratic citizenship both locally and globally.

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