

# Repositioning Nigerian Universities within a Dynamic Global University

## System: Challenges and Prospects

*Second Convocation Lecture by the Governor of Ekiti State, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, at the Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State, July 23, 2012*

### Protocols

It is always a matter of utmost pleasure for me to be on a University campus to interact with scholars, students and administrators, and indeed, the *world*; that is, the world that normally comes to a University and for which a University is created. Because the university is a veritable *universe in a city*, even if based in a small town, the universe of a university transforms its locale into a city. A true university is a place that encompasses the world: it welcomes the world and opens out to the world. As the summit of higher education, the university is the veritable instrument and institution of social transformation.

Given that the university constitutes a world, or perhaps represents a mini-world, a typical university campus, even when it is not on a single expansive land, is usually a big place; it is usually big in its virtual and/or physical space; big in its many disciplines, including colleges, schools, faculties and departments; and, big in terms of its labyrinth of rules and regulations. It is therefore easy to lose your way in a university. You can lose your way in terms of finding the specific place, classroom, or office that you are looking for; you can lose your way in terms of familiarity with the rules and regulation governing your conduct or action in the university; you can also lose your way in terms of finding the appropriate means and methods of achieving your goals within the university.

In terms of the physical or spatial dimensions of finding or losing your way in a university, many universities around the world often have maps; they, therefore, place maps and directions and names of places at strategic places and points on the university campus. The story is told of a new student in a university who was attending an orientation programme on the campus. To make it easy for the new students to find their way around the campus, specific orientation arrows were placed around the campus. Just by the side of the hall where the orientation would take place, there was a big arrow on the map with the words, "You are here." One of the new students, exhausted from moving round the campus to find the hall, created a graffiti by the side of the arrow with the words "But, why?"

This graffiti, though the work of a neophyte on a university campus, if we consider it deeply, is actually the product of a very sophisticated mind that was yet unaware of his own potential philosophical depth. This question, "But, why?" is both a personal and a collective question. A society can ask itself, "Why a University?" or "Why should we have a University?" And the student, current or graduating, can ask himself/herself, respectively, "Why am I here?" or "Why did I attend a University?" The last version of that question is one that those who are graduating from this university might be asking themselves now, after a few years of burning the proverbial midnight oil.

Distinguished guests, indeed, the students, "Jambites," (as we called fresh students in my time) and "stalites" (those in their second up to their last year), and also graduating students, need to ask themselves this question. However, the answers they provide cannot have meaning if the society at large is not able to satisfactorily answer the bigger question, which is "Why a University?" The individual student's answer to the question about why there is a need to have university education can only find meaning in the universe of the answers provided by the society at large. But the larger society cannot answer that question, unless and until, the University itself has answered the question adequately. If the sign in the university says "You

are here”, the university needs to answer the question, “Why are we here?” In other words: what are universities for?

I have been asked to speak to the issue of “repositioning the Nigerian Universities within a Dynamic Global University System.” However, we cannot begin to examine how to reposition the university system without returning to the fundamental question that I raised. This is particularly so in a country in which, in the last three decades, owing to a myriad of reasons, the *university idea*, as well as the *university ideal*, have been lost. Almost three decades ago, precisely in 1986, the Nobel laureate and Nigeria’s primus public intellectual, Professor Wole Soyinka, asked that all the universities in Nigeria be shut down for one year, while we return to the table to rethink the university idea and restart the process of rebuilding the world-class university system that we once had. Twenty four years after Soyinka’s wisdom was ignored, we are still confronted with the question that he raised by that position. How do we recover what we have lost? How do we reconstitute the University Idea?

When, in 1862, one of the three oldest universities in India, University of Bombay - which was started only five years earlier - awarded its first degrees, the Chancellor of the University, in his inaugural Convocation address, urged the students to “...recollect that you are no longer pupils of any single school, but graduates of a University.” Therefore, he added, “Your standards must henceforth be... [that] of the whole educated world.” In reminding students of that University - now called University of Mumbai - of that wisdom during their convocation earlier this year, the President of Harvard University, Professor Drew Faust, affirmed that “Universities are stewards of an unbroken and endless chain of inquiry.” Between the statement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century first Chancellor of the University of Mumbai and that of the current President of the most prestigious University in the world, Harvard University, is a fundamental declaration of the universality of the university and its central and original role in modern life.

Every university identifies its core mission as teaching, research and community engagement. But as they say in the wisdom of our ancients in Yorubaland, *O'un to' wa leyin efa,o j'oje lo* (What lies beyond six, is more than seven). What lies beyond these three critical roles of the university, is certainly far more complicated than the three words and phrase that encompass that mission. Which is why, when the new student in the story I told earlier saw the sign, "You are here," he asked the important question, "But, why?" We can ask too: why is the mission and vision of the university more complicated than its three core roles of teaching, research and community engagement suggest?

This university for instance, Osun State University, does not simply repeat the three universal core purposes of the university. There is a very good effort by the university founders to complicate these core purposes in the university's vision and mission. The vision of UNIOSUN is "To be a centre of excellence providing high quality teaching and learning experiences which will engender the production of entrepreneurial graduates capable of impacting positively on their environment while being globally competitive." From this vision, it is clear that the founders of this university not only recognised the core purposes of a university, they also acknowledge the potential universality of the university. Also, in its mission, the Osun State University, hopes "To create a unique institution committed to the pursuit of academic innovation, skill-based training and a tradition of excellence in teaching, research and community service."

By this vision and missions, UNIOSUN declares to itself and its students, particularly its graduating students, that their "standards must henceforth be... [that] of the whole educated world." What then is the standard of the "whole educated world"? How can we relate that to the questions: "Why are we here?" and

“What are Universities for?” I will endeavour in this lecture to link these questions to the quest to reposition the Nigerian Universities within a dynamic global university system

### **The University Idea and the University Ideal**

Again, why are we here? I mean why are the scholars, students and the administrators here? Why is the university here?

Let us go back in time. But we will not go back as far as the founding of the medieval European model when the word university was derived from the Latin, *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* - which roughly translates to “community of teachers and scholars,” as it was originally coined by the Italian University of Bologna founded in 1088 - the first university in human history. As you might know, University of Bologna was followed by the University of Paris, France, in 1050, Oxford University, England, in 1167, Cambridge University, England, in 1209, University of Salamanca, Spain, in 1218 and so on.

However, let us go back only as far back at the 19<sup>th</sup> century by which time the idea of a university had been fully consolidated in much of the modern world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Henry Newman, an evangelical Oxford University academic attempted to answer the question, “Why a University”, by elaborating what he called “The Idea of a University.” A university, stated Newman:

“is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. It is the place where the professor becomes eloquent, and is a missionary and a preacher, displaying his science in its most complete and most winning form, pouring it forth with the zeal of enthusiasm, and

lighting up his own love of it in the breasts of his hearers. It is the place where the catechist makes good his ground as he goes, treading in the truth day by day into the ready memory, and wedging and tightening it into the expanding reason. It is a place which wins the admiration of the young by its celebrity, kindles the affections of the middle-aged by its beauty, and rivets the fidelity of the old by its associations. It is a seat of wisdom, a light of the world, a minister of the faith, an Alma Mater of the rising generation. It is this and a great deal more, and demands a somewhat better head and hand than mine to describe it well.”

It is no surprise that Newman, who was an Anglican, and later – a most prominent Catholic priest, intellectual, and founder of University College, Dublin, imposes an evangelical mission on the University. Indeed, as a European invention, the medieval university was founded on the Christian cathedral or monastic schools. For instance, the coat of arms of Oxford University shows an open book with a Latin inscription that translates to “The Lord is my light.” In the case of Cambridge University, the motto, translated from Latin into English, is “From here, light and sacred draughts.” If we pursue the alternative history of medieval university in the Islamic tradition as symbolized by the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which was founded in 972 as a *Madrassa* (school, in Arabic) and the University of Timbuktu - located in present-day Mali (ignoring for the moment the mindless destruction that the University is currently experiencing in the hands of the Touareg rebels) - which was founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, we will find a similar evangelical mission. The University of Timbuktu existed around the Madrasa in the three mosques in Sankoré, Djinguereber and Sisi Yahya. Against this backdrop, in many ways, the modern university can be described as one with a secular evangelical mission; that is, as the (secular) light of the world. This is so because the transformation of the world, making the world into a more perfect one - shedding greater light

on the world through human knowledge, all constitute the overriding purpose of the University as a global phenomenon.

When the modern university started in Africa with the coming of Europeans and the imposition of colonialism, there were considerable debates about why higher education was needed in colonial Africa and what the role of higher education should be in Africa's colonial present and postcolonial future. I will dwell briefly on the kernel of these debates to set a backdrop to my reflections on the challenges and prospects of repositioning the Nigerian University in a global context.

### **The Originating Purposes of the African University**

The colonial roots of the modern University in Africa have been elaborated and analysed by scholars. In the Nigerian context, the works of the likes of Drs. K. Mellanby and J.T Saunders, two of the principals of the University College, Ibadan, as the University of Ibadan was then known, and Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi, Professor Takena Tamuno, Dr. O Ikejiani, Professor N. Okafor and Professor Babs Fafunwa, have already explored this. However, it is important to recall that, as Professor Ade Ajayi reminds us, "The roots of higher education in Nigeria go back to the colonial period when Nigerian leaders demanded a University as a means to their own emancipation."

This is critical because, while the emergence of the University in Europe was central to the European project of Enlightenment or civilisation, the emergence of the modern University in Africa, in general, and in Nigeria, in particular, was a specific understanding, contextualisation and leveraging of that Enlightenment project as, first and foremost, one of that was anchored on emancipation. The fact that the Nigerian anti-colonial activists insisted that the new University in Nigeria should be comparable in every way with Universities in Britain is a reminder of the fact that, despite the specific local anchoring of the reason or

justification of the need and existence of a University in Nigeria, the leaders were committed to ensuring that global standards were maintained. We are also reminded of the emancipatory potential of the University when we recall that the colonialists were very cautious in acceding to the request for the establishment of a university in colonial Nigeria. Their preference was for vocational schools run by different government departments, such as Survey School, Marine School, Railways Workshop, School of Agriculture, Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering and Education. Eventually, they established a Higher College at Yaba.

But given their knowledge of the role of a University in a modern society, one struggling for a new nationhood, independence, and the benefits of modernity, the limited aims of the Yaba College became the rallying point of the nationalists. Therefore, the opening of the College in 1934 became, as Ade Ajayi stated, “a landmark in the history of independence movement in Nigeria.” As the pressure mounted on imperial Britain to grant Nigeria what she truly desired in higher education, even that most eloquent defender of *Pax Britannica*, Margery Perham, had to concede in 1946 that “it is not for us to invent a specifically adapted form or standard of intellectual life... in the University sphere we have to offer everything. We must give what we ourselves value most highly and keep nothing back.” This was what the Nigerian nationalists wanted and this was what they got in the founding of the first University in Nigeria, the University College, Ibadan, in 1948. The University’s motto – *Recte Sapere Fons*, was and remains, in English translation, “To think straight is the fount (of knowledge).”

With self-government and full independence in the horizon, the specific form of Nigerian nationalism and regional rivalry and competition fuelled the new drive for the establishment of more universities. While the Federal Government planned to have a second University in the nation’s capital, Lagos, the three regions were eager to also have their own Universities. The Ashby’s Commission’s report had concurred with the



unrestrained desire to establish universities in the regions. This was not merely for prestige and the assertion of regional autonomy, but more important, to harness the opportunities provided by a university as instruments of regional development and even transformation. As Samuel O. Atteh attests, in the 1960s, the university was an “agent of modernization, social mobilisation, and economic growth.” Consequently, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was established by the Eastern Region in 1960, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, by the Northern Region in 1962, and the University of Ife, Ile –Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in the Western Region in the same year. What is most important to remember about this struggle among the regions to establish their own universities is that, as Professor Ade Ajayi stated in his 1975 article, “The new Universities did not abandon the tradition of high standards and international nature of Universities, but they stressed respect for an identity with the local cultures.” As the University of Ife stated unequivocally in its motto, it’s time for “learning with culture.”

We can restate the two originating purposes of the University in late colonial and postcolonial Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, as these: One, political, socio-economic and intellectual emancipation of the country and people; two, political, socio-economic and intellectual development of the country and the people. These fundamental purposes became the bedrock on which the elaboration and expansion of the Universities were built. As Ade Ajayi noted, even by mid-1970s, “[This] tradition to maintain high standards [had] not inhibited or been inhibited by the need for expansion and adaptation.” Indeed, the Universities established in the 1960s had their golden era in the 1970s and the 1980s. To give an example of the renamed University of Ife, as the University itself proudly advertises on its website even today, “In the 1970’s and the early 1980’s, the University attained a foremost position among universities in Africa, with a vibrant academic and social atmosphere and a high international reputation.”

The question that this poses is this: What has happened to the African, indeed, the Nigerian, University system since the late 1980s and early 1990s?

Mr. Governor, the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and Distinguished Guests, I am not here today to lament the fate of the Nigerian University. Rather, in making my own modest contributions regarding what needs to be done to reclaim, and even transcend, the excellence and global acclaim of the Nigerian University between the 1960s and mid 1980s, I intend to explore the possibilities of a glorious future for the Nigerian University system and, by that token, our country. What the graduating class of 2012 and those who will follow them, the young people of these age, ask from us, as leaders, is not to merely bemoan the fate of our existing and surviving institutions, but to state clearly what should be done about the critical problems they face and how we intend to work expeditiously towards providing critical solutions. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his address to the Young Democratic Club in Baltimore, Maryland, in April 1936, “The temper of our youth has become more restless, more critical, more challenging. Flaming youth has become a flaming question. And youth comes to us wanting to know what we propose to do about a society that hurts so many of them. There is much to justify the inquiring attitude of youth. You have a right to ask these questions—practical questions. No man who seeks to evade or to avoid deserves your confidence.” So, I do not intend to ‘duck and dive’, my brothers and sisters, but to confront these questions frontally.

The inquiring attitude of the youth that President Roosevelt spoke about almost eighty years ago has become even more intense in the global age. The Universities, being what Professor Drew Faust called “stewards of an unbroken and endless chain of inquiry,” are at the centre of our collective quest to rise up to meet the challenges of the present age. As Professor Tade Akin Aina, Director of Higher Education at the Carnegie Corporation in New York stated recently, “the University in Africa and higher education in general remain a significant part of the overall social, economic, and cultural constitution of societies and

nations.” This is so because, higher education “contributes to the formation and deployment of human capital, the cultural and social construction of values and meaning, and the capacity for individual and collective emancipation from ignorance and domination.” Higher education “further contributes to how the energies and products of science, technology, and the improvement of material conditions are mobilised for the well-being of individuals and groups.... It provides the platform for the advanced study, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge and its products for the benefit of society and its constituents.”

### **Repositioning the Nigerian Universities: Challenges and Prospects**

As I stated earlier, I intend to confront the question of what has happened to the African, and specifically, the Nigerian, University system, or the University idea, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, in a roundabout way, by offering suggestions on how to reposition the Nigerian Universities in the global age. I do this not merely as one who is also a Visitor to a University where, like here in UniOsun, we are committed to building a truly competitive University within the global context, but more as a member of the University community myself.

Let me reiterate the fundamentality of the knowledge industry as over-represented by the University and higher education in the search for human progress and human civilisation, particularly in the global age. This is even doubly critical for those of us who are at the margins of this global world. As Professor Aina correctly observed, “African universities operate at the fourth and fifth tiers of global knowledge production.” As old and current experiences have shown, even when a country has huge natural resources, without the development of human resources, a country with natural resources will continue to be subservient to countries with the developed human capability and capacity to extract, refine and use those natural resources. The story of Africa - a continent that is perhaps the most blessed among other continents in terms of natural resources, but one that has refused to fully develop its human resources and place these

human resources at the centre of her development agenda - is a sad one. Top on the list of the fundamental crisis of the continent is the crisis of higher education. As Professor Olugbemiro Jegede, the Secretary General Association of African Universities, stated earlier this year (and this deserves a long quotation):

“The emerging global landscape being drawn by recent developments has shown very clearly that knowledge capability and capacity, rather than natural resources, is the greatest determinant of a country’s entry into, and effective participation in, global competitiveness. It goes without saying, therefore, that higher education contributes significantly to the political, scientific, technological, economic, social and human development of any country. This is even more so for the developing countries of Africa, a continent of about one billion people characterized by the poorest countries in the world, with the world’s highest illiteracy rates, lowest participation rates in higher education, huge capacity development needs, over 20 million seeking employment annually with the youth constituting 60% of the unemployed, and a massive demand for tertiary education.”

Against this backdrop, let me start with what I consider to be the first step that we must take in the mission to reposition Nigerian Universities in a global age. Let me say with all the emphasis that I can muster that in Nigeria, as in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, we must reinvent the University Idea and rebuild the foundations of our contemporary universities to make them truly competitive in the global university system. The recent global ranking of universities in the world, despite its few problems, reflects the state of affairs in Africa, in general, and in Nigeria, in particular. Ibadan, Ife, Zaria, Nsukka, and Lagos used to rank among some of the best universities in the Commonwealth and in the world. In the last two decades, we have lost much ground. Therefore, in looking to the future, we must also look to the past. What were the best practices that made our earliest Universities globally competitive? How can we harness the tradition of

scholarship and nation-building that made those universities superb citadels of learning and relate them to the emergent dynamics of world-class higher education in the present age?

In answering these questions, we must have in mind the fundamental responsibilities of the university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the US National Centre for Public Policy and Higher Education states in its Special Report, given recent global changes “higher education has two fundamental responsibilities to help ensure the continued well-being of the nation today: [i] to provide graduates and the nation at large with the skills needed to be effective in a global, increasingly competitive economy, in which corporations reach across nations and geographical divides in search of new markets, more efficient production, and less costly labour; and, [ii] to close the achievement gap between those students in this country who are advantaged - educationally, culturally, and economically- and those who are not.”

There are several steps that must be taken to meet these two fundamental responsibilities. As some experts have stated, these will include the implementation of the 2006 Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, a document which has been adopted by the African Union. This Plan of Action “spells out the ingredients for effective, relevant, efficient and revitalised higher education for Africa in a bid to make it globally competitive.” They include:

- Encouraging greater mobility of academics, researchers, staff and students; and the recognition of qualifications from and by the different regions of Africa through the harmonization of degree structures.
- Establishing an African Higher Education and Research Space that will pay serious attention to institutional and national Quality Assurance systems and promote high level relevant research and postgraduate training tailored towards solving the daily problems which plague African

communities. [In this context, I will suggest that we rethink this function which is now placed under the National Universities Commission. It is one of the most important functions of the NUC. There might be innovative ways of ensuring that this function is performed in the best possible way, so as to raise the current low standards];

- Adopting and adapting Open and Distance Learning as instructional delivery mechanisms in Sub-Saharan Africa as has been done in other continents of the world if Africa is to significantly raise its tertiary education enrolment ratio from the current 6% (achieved through the face-to-face mode) to at least 50% within the next 5 years;
- Using Information and Communication Technologies effectively for instructional delivery, professional communication, to develop, produce, acquire and distribute knowledge, skills and competencies across the continent as fast as they are available;
- Building human resource base that will seek newer and effective ways to combat diseases, reduce energy costs and address climate change;
- Creating centres of excellence within each region of the continent to develop robust postgraduate studies and develop strong research base with global competitive advantage. [We should also try to create centres of excellence in Nigeria, but given the poor results of the earlier effort, we also need to rethink this process because it has not produced much excellence; (Indeed, my brother, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, has already broached the subject of a regional centre of excellence by pooling resources within our universities; and,
- Seeking opportunities for collaboration and partnership on equal and mutually beneficial platforms with the international world including universities in other continents, development partners, organisation and agencies genuinely interested in higher education in Africa.

Distinguished guests, the ingredients of this continental Plan of Action still needs further elaboration in the local contexts. All the steps that I have discussed, and much more, largely depend on adequate financing of the University. From the second half of the 1980s when oil prices fell in the international market, it has become clear to us in Nigeria that government alone can no longer bear the absolute costs of higher education. Even state-owned universities cannot hope to depend absolutely on the government. There are many reasons for this. First, the explosion in our population since the 1980s has meant that government alone cannot provide sufficient number of universities to cater to the needs of an increasingly youthful population. Two, the dwindling resources of a mono-product economy, such as Nigeria's, translate to greater competition for funds among many facets of governmental priorities. Consequently, despite the best efforts, the percentage of funds devoted to education, in general, and to higher education, in particular, has become insufficient to meet the expanding needs of that area of public expenditure. This is where the private universities constitute a critical partnership with public universities. No doubt a lot of private – both individual and organisational - resources have been invested in recent years into the creation and sustenance of private universities. This ordinarily is a welcome development. However, it is important to remind those involved in this task that “investment” in private higher education is not an investment in the classical neo-liberal sense. As the global poet, and I am proud to add, a distinguished son of Ekiti and citizen of the world, Professor Niyi Osundare, said in his valedictory speech at the University of Ibadan in 2005, it's “time we realised that a University can never be run as a ‘cost-effective’ corporation. There are simply certain forms of knowledge that cannot be judged on their ‘market value’”. Therefore, any individual or organisation that aims to make a profit from establishing a university is a danger to the very idea and ideal of a university. A University, whether established by a state, an organisation or an individual cannot be “owned” by any of these bodies or persons, in the normal sense; this is because a University is a *public trust*. Therefore, the overall value of a university is beyond the market, it is beyond economics and beyond

politics. The true value of a University represents the totality of our common humanity and the possibilities of our collective progress as a community.

Still on the issue of funding, I regret to note that, in this country, we have not developed the desirable culture of endowment in the area of education - the best form of philanthropy. This is something to which governments and private individuals need to pay attention. To build world-class universities and reposition our existing universities, the largest chunk of their resource base has to come from endowments. I therefore call on wealthy Nigerians and corporate citizens, and even the not-so-wealthy, to show full commitment to the creation of a better, more egalitarian, and more civilised society through regular grants and endowments to universities. There are many Osun State indigenes, for instance, both at home and abroad, who can afford to give this university a personal donation of between 1 to 20 million naira every year for the rest of their lives. Imagine if 100 citizens of this state - or even others who not necessarily citizens of the state, but who, for one reason or the other have decided to be beneficent towards the University - gives N5 million naira to UNIOSUN every year for the next 10 years. That would mean that apart from government subvention, the university would get N500 million every year. If such endowments are properly invested, this University would within a decade have the resources, to build world-class laboratories, fill the library with books and journals, and increase the opportunities for its researchers to get research grants. We produced world-class scientists in Nigeria, in the past. We can no longer do so if we lack the enabling environment for good scientific research, experiments and exposure to the state of the art in other climes. Imagine if that number were multiplied by another 500 people giving the university N1 million every year for another 20 years. For the avoidance of doubt, this is not too much for many Nigerian to give. N1 million a year is, for some people, not even up to what they spend for a first class ticket on British Airways to London. I know that some of our friends in this audience travel to London in the first class cabin even more than twice a month!



Another important way to reposition our universities in a dynamic global system is linked to resources. This is in the area of scholarly resources, particularly books and journals, both soft and hard copies. The state of the libraries in the Nigerian University system leaves a lot to be desired. This is one of the biggest impediments to the flowering of ideas and the development of world-class scholarship and the training of world-class students, both undergraduate and post-graduate. While I recognise the valiant efforts by many of our university administrators working with international organisations to reinvent the libraries, much more still needs to be done. One critical suggestion is for these institutions to find foreign partners that can help in facilitating access to online publications, particularly journals for our scholars and students. There are also many innovative ways of ensuring that foreign publishers, as a mark of their public, international commitments, are able to send certain number of copies of their latest publications to our libraries here free of charge. If this happens, it is obvious that they will not be able to send to every university. In that case, we also need to establish a very efficient and effective means of interlibrary loans in the Nigerian University system. There is no reason why an environmental science student or scholar in Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, who wants to compare and contrast the problem of desertification in Sokoto State with the challenges of erosion in the Imo State, should not be able to get a critical study of erosion lying in the library of Imo State University, Owerri, through interlibrary loan.

Still related to this is the challenge of new technologies. To be able to accomplish the above easily and seamlessly, we need to create a new technologically-friendly environment in our Universities by investing heavily in new technologies. Going through the website of UNIOSUN, I was impressed to see that ICT is taken very seriously by the University – but a lot more is required. The full networking of our universities is a task that must be accomplished, if we are to compete in a global age. No university campus should be without wireless internet in this age. We must work towards investing in this. There are several benefits of

this, a few of which I can mention here. All and every of our higher institution ought to be so well linked through the Information and Communication Technologies such that all our scholars, administrators and students will be able to collaborate and exchange ideas and learn best practices without stress. Also, through heavy investment in new technologies, students of UNIOSUN who are interested in a special branch of medical sociology, which may be offered by a world-class expert in Harvard University, may be able to log on through Skype every week to the professor's lecture in Harvard by special arrangement. This is already happening in many parts of the world. Students in China are taking classes through Skype in American universities. Also, American students who want to learn certain aspects of Ifa from a Professor of Yoruba religion, will have the opportunity through Skype to sit down in their classroom in Atlanta and watch the lecture of the Nigerian professor as it is going on in Osogbo. This will also advertise to the world that, in spite of the brain drain, we still have excellent and world-class scholars who are toiling in Nigeria, despite all the odds. In fact, through such a system as suggested here, students may have the benefit of having Chief Yemi Elebuibon's guest-lecture from Osogbo beamed by Skype to students in any corner of the Americas, Europe or Asia. Also, through investments in new technologies, we can save many of the trees that we cut regularly to make papers - which leads to deforestation. Students can submit their papers to their lecturers without having to print them out. And the lecturers can read the papers online and save the trees.

We must also evolve a means by which we can use the talent and expertise of Nigerian academics in the Diaspora to enhance our University system in every way - from teaching to postgraduate research supervision, and to even university administration, all in very innovative ways. The task is for those of us in government to work with the administrators of both public and private universities to evolve innovative ways of doing this. Our government in Ekiti already works with EKSU management on this particular goal. As Professor Adigun Agbaje, former Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics) of the University of Ibadan told the

*Chronicle of Higher Education* a couple of years ago, “Our Diaspora is part of our resources. And in a resource-strapped environment, we must draw on all our resources.” Another distinguished African scholar in the diaspora, Professor Paul Tiyembe Zeleza argued: “Africa, perhaps the least educated and most underdeveloped continent in the world, has the most educated population in the World’s most developed country – America.” This gaping mismatch is undoubtedly a tragedy, but it is one that can be turned in Africa’s favour if effective strategies are developed to turn the brain drain into brain gain or turn it into what some have called “brain mobility”. There is therefore no reason why many of our scholars based in Europe and America, and even elsewhere in Africa, cannot be made to teach in summer schools or teach specific summer classes in most of our universities when they come home every year - or when they are on sabbatical leave. We have some of the most accomplished academics and professionals from the biological sciences to engineering, from literature to sociology, who will be willing, if a programme is put in place, to come home regularly to teach our students. Some of them might even be willing to do this free. As a regular participant in the annual African Studies Association conference before taking up my current assignment, I can confirm the interest of several of our scholars in the diaspora in assisting and exchanging knowledge and experience. Indeed, I have as my guests at this convocation lecture two of my friends from the academy in America who have been helping out in Ekiti and Osun States. We can, therefore, turn *brain drain* into *brain gain*. Through this, we can expose our students, and even their colleagues, to the latest thinking on every field of human endeavour in the world and encourage international forms of mentoring for our students and young scholars.

If we accomplish some of the above, I have no doubt that this would lead to other benefits, one of which would be curriculum review in our universities. There is the need for constant change and diversification of areas and focal points of teaching. There are many of our universities who still have the courses taught between the 1960s and 1980s on their curriculum. Even some of our professors have been teaching the

same thing for about three decades now. For instance, how many of our communications department now offer courses in the latest cutting-edge ICTs and their relationship with modern society? Up till recent years, some Political Science Departments still had “Politics of Communist State in Eastern Europe” in their syllabus! What new technologies and new discoveries drive the curriculum in our Agricultural Science Faculties? We had the experience of this stone age attitude when we introduced our ‘computer on every desk’ policy in our secondary schools in Ekiti. Not a few commentators, including university academics articulated the view that it was an unnecessary, expensive and irrelevant scheme. Just a few months after, JAMB announced that its examinations would now be computer based. Pray, how would a student who is not familiar with ICT perform in such an examination? Your guess is of course as good as mine. What im saying in summary is that we cannot afford to close our minds to technological innovations in the University setting.

Related to above is the need for our universities to recognise and fully embrace the fact that the global university today is one of inter-disciplinarity. The old practices of protecting disciplinary turfs have become so obsolete that they can no longer fit into current practices in a truly modern University.

It is important to also underscore a perverse practice in our university system in the last two decades. Scholarship is a global endeavour. We delude ourselves and short-change our future if we set different and lower standards for ourselves. Academic publishing in the Nigerian University in recent years has become, sadly for many academics, a Dugbe market endeavour. People rush to publish just about anything in just about any journal, many of them absolutely devoid of even the most basic standards. Everyone starts a journal at his or her convenience and prints the journal only to serve the purpose of ensuring that people get largely underserved promotion. The idea of a refereed journal has been bastardized by some Nigerian academics to the point that even traders now have more original things to say about our society than some

scholars. Many of these *Dugbe-market journals* have proliferated on our campuses. We are now producing a generation of scholars who no longer have a good idea of what it means for a journal to be truly international, in a profession that is nothing but international. I don't want to be misunderstood. The fact that a scholarly journal is published in Osogbo, Ife, Sokoto, Kaduna, Owerri, or Wilberforce Island, does not mean it cannot be international. After all, only about three to four decades ago, scholars around the world struggled to publish in journals that were based in Nigerian Universities. For instance, *Odu: A Journal of West African Studies*, published in Ife was, for many years, a highly-respected international refereed journal. Why are current generations of scholars eager to cut corners by publishing, and publishing in, third-rate journals while avoiding the high standards of world-class journals? Why are scholars so eager these days to become professors even before they learn how to profess? Why are we so enamoured of producing VCs without CVs? Where is the Ibadan History School of old? Where is the Zaria School of Architecture? Ife School of Administration? Lagos School of Engineering? How can we reinvent such famous vanguards of scholars who make important interventions in global scholarship?

In repositioning the Nigerian University, we also need to rethink the linkage between town and gown. We need to reinvent a University system that constantly relates research to local and global needs. Our Universities, in the best tradition of research, should identify social problems and work toward providing solutions. Our industries and governments must also be ready to partner with the Universities to do this. We need to address such questions as how to ensure that our engineering departments are able to pull resources to end our power generation, distribution and supply problem. Our scholars in the engineering departments, both at home and abroad, have the capacity for this. Therefore, how can we empower them to become social problem-solvers rather than mere repeaters of theories in the classrooms? If the governments and the society at large empower our scientists, they will be able to lead the needed technological and scientific revolution in our country. Let us challenge the sciences and engineering

faculties of our universities to start by even generating their own power – solar, wind, coal, etc. - their own water, and recycling their own garbage. Let the universities provide the lead. We can ensure the necessary legal environment for this. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Ibadan generates its own power; it is an institution that is sufficient for itself. Why shouldn't all of our universities do the same?

In linking town and gown though, the University must also challenge the tyranny of value-neutral knowledge. While it is attractive to pursue academic objectivity in the intellectual tradition, one must caution that such objectivity is always for some purpose and we often cannot separate our interests from our interpretations of society around us. University scholars must be ready to wage a war of "positions" as the Italian sociologist, Anthonio Gramsci, urged upon us. Scholars must not shy away from the development process. Indeed, committed scholarship must help provide the road map for people's empowerment. Academics, in my humble opinion, must not be content with sterile scholarship in the ivory tower. A major duty of transformative scholarship in the global context is to help provide the intellectual ammunition for the formulation, articulation and implementation of public policies. Again, as Zeleza argued, "the contexts and constraints that shape academic production are subject to changes emanating as much from the academy itself as from the wider society." On a personal note, this is why I am dusting my own books to share some thoughts and reflections on a regular basis in my own local university in Ado Ekiti – EKSU where we are finalising plans with the cooperation of the Vice Chancellor and subject to the approval of the University Senate to establish an Institute of Peace and Security Studies to produce graduate students and researchers in a field that is most necessary at a time that our country is daily ravaged by challenges of insecurity. We must reverse the tendency that often results in our academics abandoning scholarship and teaching completely once they move on to politics, business or administration. If we must reposition the university within a global context, the university must not be a closed mind in its intellectual tradition. Indeed, it must consciously provide space for practitioners to share their experiences in public life

## Conclusion

Your Excellency, the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor and Distinguished Guests, Andrew Carnegie, the late Scottish-American industrialist, remains one of the most important philanthropists in the last two centuries. After amassing a lot of wealth, he turned to philanthropy with a close attention to education. He established a few foundations that still give grants for educational causes around the world, almost a century after he died. In 1887, Carnegie stated that “Upon no foundation but that of popular education can a man erect the structure of an enduring civilisation.” He lived this maxim and his immortality rests on that maxim - one to which he gave his wealth.

Carnegie’s life of devotion to education exemplified by this maxim is a challenge to us today. To erect an enduring civilization, we must make heavy investment in popular education. The University is the pinnacle of this investment. In this audience today are people acting within or outside the University system who have made important sacrifices for building and sustaining an excellent tradition of public education. I wish to acknowledge the sacrifices and commitment of these people, despite the great challenges faced by the University system in Nigeria. I wish to commend my brother and friend for his pioneering effort in the establishment and running of this University. However, as it is evident from my lecture today, we can only call upon him and others like him to make further sacrifices. *Ba’oku, Ise o tan.* Interesting enough, we are in a state (Osun) where the state anthem is a regular reminder that we have work to do (*“Ise wa fun’le wa....”*). If this state, and indeed Nigeria, must take its rightful place in a global world, if we must erect an enduring civilisation, it cannot be done without a strong foundation in popular education, the highest of which is the University.

To the graduating students, I wish you well. I also wish to remind you of the words of the Chancellor of the

Bombay University: “you are no longer pupils of any single school, but graduates of a University. Your standards must henceforth be... [that] of the whole educated world.”

I thank you for your attention.



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