

**Citizenship, Democratization, Human Security and Development, and the Mission of Universities
and other Tertiary Institutions**

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1. Introduction

The growing crises of citizenship, democratization and development including human security in Nigeria partly provides evidence of gross underperformance and the increasing irrelevance of the universities in particular in meeting the expectations of the Nigerian society. At the same time, they point to a certain lacuna in the discharge of responsibilities on the part of the universities to the nation. Addressing these issues which are organically linked were both explicitly and implicitly at the heart of the delivery of university education at the time of their conception considering the anti-colonial sentiments and the promise of independence that largely framed the emergence of Nigerian universities. The universities, for example, were expected to provide the linchpin for addressing the numerous afflictions that accompanied foreign domination; in particular to contribute to the goals of promoting national cohesion and a national citizenship, play a vital role in releasing the democratic energy of the people by building national citizenship and promoting democratic values and ethos, and enhance human security which at once connotes the entrenchment of democratic governance in the society and meeting the material welfare of the majority of the population.

The gross deficits of the university system is therefore not in doubt. To worsen matters, public universities have become the most vicious sites for fomenting ethnic and regional divisions and for unleashing forces that are tearing at the fabric of national unity and a common national citizenship. This is because key university processes especially recruitment of academic and non-academic staff, recruitment of principal officers and admission of students are increasingly captured by local interests, fueled by the ideology of “statism” and “indigeneity”. In most cases, these divisions have permeated the students movement such that both federal and state-owned universities are held hostage by such interests. Similarly, growing authoritarian tendencies within the university system has crippled the system to a point that the universities lost their pre-eminent positions as sites for the reproduction of knowledge that supported the struggle for the expansion of the democratic space as well as autonomous space of resistance to authoritarian rule.

While it is known that absence of political will and endemic corruption have contributed to crisis of development, especially the increasing spatial, class and gender inequalities, decline in the quality of tertiary education linked to the production of skilled manpower to plan and implement public policies remains a pronounced element of the problem. Thus, aside the crisis of governance which is a key element of this dimension of the challenge of development and human security, the progressive decline in the material wellbeing of the majority of the population measured in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) points to the direction about a reform agenda especially in the area of curricula development that could make the universities more relevant in the years to come.

It is, however, important to bear in mind the dialectical interplay between the university system on the one hand and the general crises of the economy, governance, and the management of diversity on the other in explaining the myriads of problems and the crisis of relevance faced by the former. For example, the economic crisis of the early 1980s and the subsequent imposition of the structural adjustment programme took a heavy toll on university funding which had a corrosive effect on teaching and research infrastructure and on the welfare of the various segments of the university system. Equally true, is the pressure mounted on the public universities by the desire to implement Affirmative Action policies in the form of ‘quota system’ and ‘catchment policies’ to redress imbalance in opportunities and access between the different

ethnic and regional homelands. More often than not, vested local interests who seek greater access to opportunities offered by universities located on their soil have taken advantage of such policies to subvert the public purpose of the system.

There is also the decline of pedagogy in university teaching and research especially once the manifest crises in higher education provided excuse for the intervention of the Bretton Woods institutions especially the World Bank. At the height of such intervention was the pressure to de-emphasize courses in the arts, humanities and the social sciences and the crusade mounted against those who were alleged to be teaching what they were not paid to teach. Not to be ignored was the increasing disconnect between the universities, policy makers and the industries. The loss of relevance by the universities especially research led to a situation in which the NGOs came to enjoy more patronage in action research.

It is against the foregoing background that this paper examines the university system and other tertiary institutions in relation to issues of citizenship, democratization, human security and development. The paper first relates the universities in terms of their mission and mandate to each of these issues in order to underscore what is the missing link. It also discusses possible reforms and policies that could reposition the universities to be more relevant in Nigeria's search for democratic citizenship, the deepening of the democratization process and the advancement of national development at the heart of which is the search for human security. This is followed by a concluding section.

2. The Universities and Knowledge Production: In the Beginning

It is useful to emphasize that putting forward a reform agenda for Nigerian universities, especially to refocus them to address the challenge of building democratic citizenship, a democratized society and the guarantee of human security and development takes us back to the essence of knowledge production as cut out for the universities in the beginning. This underlying essence applies to all universities regardless of the ownership structure: whether public, private or faith-based. The essence of knowledge production through research and dissemination is to connect to the everyday aspirations of the common people, developing the power of the people and furnishing it with a distinctive alternative to conventional politics that strangulates the people while at the same time developing their civic capacities and muscles. In this sense university education is expected to, among other things, provide the linchpin for the galvanising the democratic development of society, unbundle the democratic energies of the people, and create citizens who are in the position to make right claims on both government and corporate business to adhere to the promotion of the public good.

Unfortunately, the too familiar tale of the crises of tertiary education which began in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s, provided the basis for a series of reforms and rationalisations which have had the profound consequences on the system. In particular, the combined effects of the intervention of the World Bank, decline in funding and high level of graduate unemployment led to increasing de-emphasis on the arts and humanities in favour of the core sciences and science-related disciplines. In many cases the casualties were disciplines and courses perceived as having radicalising influence on students and the targets were academics accused of teaching what they were not paid to teach. Then, the collapse of communism and the command economies inspired by the former Soviet Union sounded the death knell of alternative viewpoints. The implication is that the social sciences and humanities have largely been emptied of their original content, while the healthy culture of debate structured along ideological lines has been replaced by primordial divisions usually along ethno-religious and regional fault lines.

Indeed, robust debate about the public purpose of university education dominated debates from the early times in the United States and other developed industrial societies. This public purpose begins with the role of university and tertiary education in shaping the fabric of society in a myriad of ways. These include a

determined effort through university teaching and research to promote civic and social responsibility among students in ways that improve the quality of civil engagement, reconnecting with the political life of communities to ensure that educational learning activities become sites for democratising society, and devoting substantial time in research and knowledge production to connect to the fundamentals of the ordinary people.

Of course, there is hardly a consensus among scholars especially in the social sciences as to what should be the level of the commitment of the intellectual to the society within academic research and scholarships are embedded. While scholars rooted in the behavioural and empiricist tradition insist that it is possible to study society and the human problem in a detached and objective way, those struck on the post-behaviouralist tradition have always insisted that a value-free, social science not linked with the emancipation of the poor and excluded is hardly possible. Regardless of how this debate is resolved, it remains a key challenge if knowledge production and dissemination remains detached and isolated from the experiences of ordinary people.

Even more significant regarding the open ended nature of the public interest which knowledge production is expected to serve, is the establishment and flowering of a democratic atmosphere on campuses, full of debate, discussion, experimentalism and open display of viewpoints including ideologically informed ones, linked to the purpose of searching for alternative ways on constructing society for the advancement of the collective well being of the people. In this regard, not even the core sciences despite the assumed objectivity underlying their methods of inquiry can claim to be neutral because in the final analysis the end of use of scientific research cannot be neutral in the way it impacts on people in accordance with their class position or social location.

In one of the most robust debates in mid-20th century United States of America, Dewey (1902; 1937), insisted that public functions constitute the essential justification for the existence of university. Responding to an editorial in The New York Times which defended the right of the University of Pennsylvania to fire the economic reformer Scott Nearing in the first half of the 20th century, Dewey, with rare forthrightness stated as follows:

You apparently take for granted that a modern university is a personally conducted institution like a factory and that if for any reason the utterances of any teacher, within or without the university walls, are objectionable to the trustees there is nothing more to be said... (But) the modern university is in every respect, save for its legal management, a public institution with public responsibilities. Professors have been trained to think of the pursuit and expression of truth as a public function to be exercised on behalf of the interest of their moral employer – society as a whole (Quoted in Boyte, 2002, p11)

For the social sciences and the humanities in particular, the universities are challenged to use knowledge production as a source of forging social capital to challenge the logic of the path to development that has been foisted on the people including the unquestionable wisdom of neo-liberalism and a market led process of capitalist modernization. While the ideology of globalization provides the cover, the process of national development has been undermined by corporate greed even in the face of evidence across the world that there are limits to reliance on the market as the framework of development.

Furthermore, everywhere we are assaulted by the negative cultural influences of globalization including cyber crime and pornography which even policy makers appear to capitulate to as representing irresistible realities. One could go and provide several other examples of core societal values that are being eroded while the values of honesty, integrity and patriotism are receding. In the face of these numerous afflictions and the increasing challenge of democratic development manifested in deeply flawed elections, entrenchment of a culture of impunity and corruption, Nigerian universities need to sit back and revisit the very public essence if

the universities at the very beginning so that we can reform them as a vital transformative process of work and engagement and creating public spaces for democracy (Boyte, 2002:2).

3. Universities and National Development: Citizenship, Democratization and Human Security

This section provides a situation analysis of Nigeria in relation to issues of citizenship, democratization and human security. The purpose is to briefly indicate the dimensions of these crises and indicate the lacuna that exist which the universities can fill as important sites for the production of knowledge, ideas, values and practices that can support the wider search for democratic citizenship, the struggle for popular empowerment and the advancement of human security and collective welfare.

3.1. The Crisis of Citizenship and University Education

Citizenship relates to reciprocity of rights and obligations between the state on the one hand, and members of the political community on the other. Not only does it denote membership of a political community and the recognition of man or woman as a “political being”, it also requires a shared set of goals and values in a political community, and embodies other political values such as civic activity, public spiritedness and political participation. Citizenship rights are conferred on a person endowed with full political and civil rights in a state. It therefore has much to do with the political, civil and social rights attributable to the individual as a member of a state (See Whitaker, 1964; Ofoegbu and Nwosu, 1986).

Developed in the context of the bourgeois revolution and the ascendancy of liberalism, the idea of citizenship rests on two main foundations: belief in the abstract individual in opposition to the state and the sanctification of private property based on the interest of the atomistic individual. The ideals were embodied in the French and American revolutions and expanded as the western ruling class gained more confidence with the consolidation and generalization of commodity relations. The liberal democratic state emerged in this context, with the guarantees of individual constitutional rights that ensured the transformation of "subjects" into "citizens". Citizenship is thus defined in terms of the special status granted by the state to its members and expresses at the formal level, the equality of all before the state. Emphasizing that citizenship is one of the most central values of the modern state, Laski (1982: 92) makes the following perceptive observations:

In any state, the demands of each citizen for the fulfillment of his best self must be taken as of equal worth and the utility of a right is therefore its value to all members of the state.....(Every right is) either equally applicable to all citizens without distinction or not applicable at all

The rights of citizens essentially include political, civil and social rights. Ordinarily, the rights of a citizen should include socio-economic rights such as the right to employment, education and to economic well-being which constitute the domain of social citizenship. More often than not, discourses on citizenship are narrowly focused on civil and political liberties such as the right to life, freedom of religion, peaceable assembly and freedom from discrimination to mention just a few. But citizenship also entails obligations which the individual owes the state with implied sanctions should the individual fail to live up to expectation.

To summarise, three important issues stand out in the discourse of citizenship. First, the application of universality of rights based on a common membership of a state or a nation-state forges not just a common

national identity but the indivisibility of the common destiny of all. Two, arising from this commonality of interests and destiny in the collective enforcement of rights by citizens in opposition to the state as opposed to membership of the nation-state. Three, in a multi-cultural setting, it is about protecting the collective rights of all while at the same time respecting differences be they of ethnicity, region, gender and other forms of differences. In other words, “politics of difference” can co-exist with a common citizenship.

However, what one finds is the tendency to accord separate rights to groups which is at variance with a notion of common citizenship that makes fractured and differentiated citizenship a basic aspect of the political life of societies with deep ethnic divisions and cleavages (Kymilicka and Norman, 2000: 3). This is most graphically illustrated by the Nigerian situation where groups appeal to notions of identity and difference that leave little room for promoting and nurturing a common citizenship.

The context for this is the constitutional distinction between a formal citizenship of the Nigerian state based on birth and naturalisation on the one hand, and membership of an ethnic community of a state which is the basis for establishing who an ‘indigene’ is for the purpose of operationalizing the “federal character” provisions in the Nigerian constitution. Although a progressive idea in terms of responding to the challenge of diversity, discrimination against people who live outside of the states in which they can establish that they are indigenes has become entrenched. Among local groups this distinction is even more deadly as groups resort to history of migration in order to prove who first settled for the purpose of labelling others ‘settlers’. The numerous conflicts that have pitched different ethnicities against one another in deadly confrontations in Wukari (Tiv versus Jukun; Zango-Kataf (Hausa vs Atyab), Nasarawa Toto (Bassa versus Ebira) and within the same ethnic groups such as the Ife/Modake and Aguleri/Umuleri have origins in “indigene/settler” distinction.

In practical terms, therefore, what obtains in Nigeria is a layered system of citizenship, differentiating access of different groups to rights and privileges. Those most privileged are those who belong to the indigenous communities of the state in which they reside. Those citizens who are “indigenes” of other states are less favoured. The least favoured are those citizens who are unable to prove that they belong to a community indigenous to any state in Nigeria. Women who are married to men from states other their own are in a dilemma as they can neither be accepted in their “states of origin” or that of their husbands. Alongside this, there is the unique disadvantage of foreigners who are married to Nigerian women. Discrimination and exclusion arising out of this makes it particularly difficult for migrants in rural locations to have access to farmlands because ‘indigeneity’ implies membership of the local ethnic community which also gives undue power to the traditional ruler in regulating access to land understood as the collective, natural possession of the ethnic group.

The crisis of citizenship depicted here is acute. It has shown a high propensity to undermine unity, cohesion and the continued existence of Nigeria as a corporate entity. At the micro-level, conflicts and violence along indigene/settler fault line has undermined peaceful co-existence and pitched communities in deadly confrontations. While at the national level, discriminations based on states of origin, ethnicity, region and geo-political zones have weakened bonds of national unity and the notion of a common citizenship. This a fundamental question about the quality and content of university education especially if we can produce graduates conscious of a common Nigerian identity, let alone become democratic citizens that can exercise their political rights and make claims on the state to fulfil its obligations to society.

Unfortunately, these divisions that have permeated civil society have infested the university system. They are reflected in pressures that recruitment of academic staff, key university officials especially vice-chancellors and

admission into the universities reflect local interests and demands. It was anticipated that universities in Nigeria as elsewhere demonstrate relevance to local demands, not only in terms of recruitment of certain staff and admission policies but to some extent in terms of research priorities. This much was the basis for introducing the quota system and catchment policies especially for the federal universities. Even state-owned universities have considerations for such policies.

Nigerian universities have to be challenged by these ugly developments for a number of reasons. To begin with, the universities especially the public funded ones must demonstrate manifest commitment to the advancement of the ideals of national unity and the very important notion of public good behind their being set up. Furthermore, it needs to be realised that the kind of divisions being fomented in the universities are an antithetical to the notion of the “universum” – the very fundamental notion of the university as a place for bringing all forms and sources of knowledge (Sawyer, 2004). Without begging the question, fragmentation of the university community especially along primordial lines threatens academic quality, knowledge production and long-term sustainability. Even more damaging is the tendency for such polarisation to undermine the organisational and normative structures of the university system.

3.2. The Challenge of Democratization and the Universities

Democratization describes the complex processes involved in the transition from authoritarian rule or state to a more liberal and plural political order in which the entrenchment of democracy including periodic and regular elections, rule of law, protection of the rights of citizens and accountable governance are among the key elements. Whereas a monolithic political order and absence of a plurality of voices and organizations constitute the hallmark of authoritarian regimes, democratization involves change processes aimed at the liberalization of the political space, the creation of plural or multiple centres of power, the increase in the margin of freedom and a regime of associational life committed to the entrenchment of respect for human rights and the advancement of civil and political liberties.

Democratization is propelled by democratic forces within society that seek to expand the political space and the margin of freedom against the claims of a totalizing state. It passes through distinct stages and phases, produces winners and losers, or ensures the ascendance of some groups and the withering away of others. This in itself makes the process a conflict-ridden one. Likely gainers and groups in ascendancy fight to entrench their positions while losers seize the new opportunities to express bottled up anger. The mobilization of critical voices, forces and groups within the civil society, the formation of political parties and the conduct of free and open electoral competition for power are critical stages of democratization, and could provide avenue for the mobilization of primordial sentiments. Although the transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic order is not linear, with possibilities of reversals, the entrenchment of democratic form of rule and culture is the expected outcome.

However, the discourse on democracy in our time has become painfully narrowed to the libertarian dimension of democracy as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution (Ake, 1987). The implication is that democracy especially in the age of globalization has come to be equated with liberal democracy. Having become narrowly defined as liberal democracy, the values which it came to espouse and defend, equally became constricted: as civil and political liberties and the associated representative institutions. In essence, liberal democracy becomes a political system in which there is the choice of leaders by the people through

competitive elections, multi-partyism and guarantee of extensive civil and political rights, the rule of law and public accountability (Diamond, 1996).

Despite the transition to civilian rule in May 1999 and conducting four successive elections that have facilitated peaceful transfer of power from one civilian regime to another, increasing concerns that a possible relapse into authoritarian rule is possible, that citizens cannot hold their 'elected' governments to account, and that elections management bodies are not structurally independent show that democratization in Nigeria is challenged by uncertainties. It may be useful to provide some useful illustrations here.

First, is the kind of neo-patrimonial democracy that exists in Nigeria in which the people are divorced from the choice of their leaders and the process of decision-making. Underlying this is the high profitability of state power and the phenomenal situation of elite capture of power and resources, at the core of which is the oil-based process of accumulation and wealth generation with a rebounding effect on the electoral process. It fuels electoral authoritarianism expressed in the impunity that have characterized elections since independence and have become more pronounced since Nigeria's return to civil politics in May 1999. The formal and procedural elements of electoral democracy are flawed because of the reality of people "voting without choosing" (Ake, 1987) with the consequence that elections serve as a veneer cloaking an authoritarian regime, precisely because of lack of organic connection between the electorate and the officials they allegedly elected.

Second, is the ugly interface between identity politics framed around ethnicity and religion on the one hand, and democratization on the other, which generates tension and conflict. There is often the difficulty associated with democratization in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural context. Ethnic 'entrepreneurs' often make a political 'capital' out of ethnic differences in order to capture power. As Huntington (1989:6) puts it, "the easiest way to win votes is to appeal to tribal, ethnic and religious constituencies". This is most evident during periods of free and competitive electoral politics. Besides, party politics and elections have the tendency to throw up certain patterns of ethnic alliances, the outcome of which may trigger off new patterns of ethnic divisions or the deepening of existing ones. In urban and local contexts characterized by multi-ethnic political existence, indigene/settler dichotomy provides the commonest fault lines for political mobilization and conflict.

Third, the basic institutions of democracy like political parties are fundamentally flawed. The weaknesses of the political parties as institutional foundations of democracy have become even more obvious since the emergence of the fourth Republic. The key elements of the weaknesses of the party system include the absence of internal democracy, exclusion and marginalization of women, weak financial accountability, lack of effective representation, absence of ideology and policy development and the resort to violence as means of resolving conflicts. In addition, the election management bodies at national and state levels are independent only in name as they are constituted largely by members of the ruling party, and are not accountable to the people. For the political class therefore, elections only provide a mechanism for elite bargain in terms of access to power and sharing the perquisites of state power.

To worsen the situation, the democratization process occurs in the context of mass poverty and unemployment despite the impressive statistics about sustained economic growth. It would appear that the neo-liberal economic reform agenda which is presented as the necessary correlate of political liberalization contributes substantially to the grinding poverty and socio-economic hardship. This neo-liberal strategy that

makes the market the linchpin of development is encapsulated in the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which is replicated as the official paradigm of development at state and local levels. Sustained growth without social inclusion contributes substantially to democratic deficits as democracy fails to deliver on problems of extreme poverty, growing inequality and social justice (Gaventa, 2006:9). The consequence is that democracy is emptied of its social and material contents, rendered hollow, illiberal and fragile.

While it is true that that Nigeria has made progress in electoral democracy, democratization remains infant with indicators that consolidation of democracy appears to be an issue for a long haul. Massive evidence of electoral authoritarianism once aptly captured by Do the Votes Count ?(TMG, 2003; 2007) and which reached the peak in the 2007 elections have largely remained despite the success in the 2011 elections. The threat represented by lack of structural autonomy on the part of election management bodies to the consolidation of electoral democracy is best dramatized in the complete absence of the sanctity of the votes in the series of local government elections conducted since 1999. The reason being that State Independent Electoral Commissions exist at the behest of State Governors and constituted largely by card carrying members of the ruling parties. This subversion of the peoples will is replete in the conduct of all the political parties and not limited to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the national level.

The increasing helplessness of many Nigerians regarding the value of their votes and inability to hold their governments to account is reinforced by the entrenched culture of corruption and impunity that have undermined the welfare and rights of citizens. Whether you are looking at what has happened to pension funds or the sharp practices that have attended to the management of oil 'subsidy' regime in the country, one cannot but conclude that Nigerians are at the mercy of their leaders, and that while civil society remains structurally weak, citizens lack the voice in the management of the public space. It is no wonder therefore that Nigeria remains far from meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Ordinarily, one would expect that Nigerian universities would demonstrate their relevance through knowledge production, engagement with policy makers and civil society as well as their internal practices in providing the pathways to building a democratic society. While the universities cannot be blamed for the authoritarian culture that has bottled the democratic energies of the people and have held development hostage, the fact that university leadership itself is characterized by authoritarian tendencies contrary to the committee system that forms the democratic foundation of university governance calls for concern. Nevertheless, this is a critical challenge the universities must address.

3.3. Human Security and the Place of Universities

The notion of human security is all-encompassing covering the sphere of development, governance and welfare and reflects a fundamental paradigm shift in the discourse of national security which in the security environment of cold war was centred on the security of the state and its ruling elements. It is now widely accepted that conception of national security in the cold war era is fundamentally flawed. Among others, it reduced national security as a military problem that requires increased defence expenditure for procurement of sophisticated military hardware and the modernization of security agencies, gave primacy to external threat at the expense of domestic economic, social and political arrangements for the advancement of the collective welfare of the citizenry, and ignores the demand for security from elements within the state and society and

reifies the state such that it becomes divorced from the interests of individuals and groups (Nnoli, 2006). The new focus on human security shares the conceptual space of people-centred approach to human development pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Central to the idea of human security as espoused by the 1994 Human Development Report on Human Security, are two important concerns: freedom from fear intended to indicate freedom from violence, and freedom from want, which is intended to indicate freedom from poverty (UNDP, 2004; Social Watch Report, 2004). In this conception of human security, human beings become the “vital core” with “fundamental set of functions related to survival, livelihood and dignity” as the irreducible minimum (Alkire, 2003: 24).

Not only does this notion of human security shift attention to persons regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or citizenship (Alkire, 2003:2), it recognizes that states are composed of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions that have their peculiar security needs including physical safety and the protection of their ways of life and other values (Nnoli, 2006: 58). The multidimensional nature of this conception of human security is underlined by the recognition given to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. The implication is that, domestic imperatives such as the welfare of citizens and the larger issues of development and redistribution of wealth among the different strata of society as well as issues of governance, the realization of social citizenship for the subaltern social groups and classes, respect for group identity and self-determination for minority groups become central issues.

All this implies that the post-cold war era has brought to the fore issues of governance, the development of constitutional states in which the basic institutions and structures of democracy are strengthened to ensure, fair and elections, poverty eradication, human rights and the flowering of civil and political liberties. This follows the realization that intra-state conflicts, which have shown greater capacity to undermine national security, are a fall out of the authoritarian state and the pervasive problem of mal-governance that arises from the authoritarian character of the state. Consequently, the new conception of national security places a high premium on domestic factors that may threaten the viability of the state and hence could undermine internal security.

Within the domestic arena, therefore, threats to national security could emanate from diverse sources including the mismanagement of the economy by the governing elite, corrupt practices that subvert collective welfare and development, insurgency activity from disaffected elements such as ethnic and religious minorities as well as ethno-religious conflagrations. To this extent, the phenomenon of ethno-religious conflict can be seen as a product of a flawed conception of the nation-state project and of statehood. The distortion of the development process resulting from this as well as the unevenness generated by capitalist modernization tend to result in structural inequalities which are then expressed in the forms of violent conflict in so far as such conflict is “most commonly associated with poverty, inequality and unequal access to resources, influence and power” (Leftwich, 2005: 687).

To bring this matter home, it is important to briefly reflect on the state of Nigeria’s development and the extent to which it has advanced human security. Take, for example, the country’s Human Development Index (HDI), a global measure of performance of countries factoring standard of living, life expectancy, level of education and literacy. By African standard, Nigeria ranks 25 and falls within the categories of categories that are rated low.

Furthermore, despite the impressive record of economic growth in the last five years and being rated among the fastest growing economies in the world, the recent poverty figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) raise huge alarm in terms of the rising levels of poverty and the spatial distribution of poverty and inequality. The NBS data in terms of relative and absolute poverty measures as well as dollar per day measure shows that whereas relative poverty was 54.4% in 2004, it increased to 69% in 2010, but with the North-West and North-East geo-political zones recording the highest poverty rates of 77.7% and 76.3% respectively. On its part, absolute poverty increased from 54.7% in 2004 to 60.9% in 2010, again with the North-West and North-East geo-political zones accounting for the highest in the country, represented by 70% and 69% respectively. For the dollar per day measure, it said the figure increased from 51.6% in 2004 to 61.2% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

The universities do have a role to play in engaging on policy issues especially those relating to economic growth and development because issues of poverty and inequality have direct implications for the survival of the country as an entity aside from the reality of hardships that poverty and illiteracy pose for the majority of the people. For instance, a cursory look at the mounting threats posed by insecurity and insurgency, especially the Boko Haram phenomenon, it is difficult to exonerate issues of poverty and inequality looking at their spatial distribution that the NBS figures show despite the recognition that there could be other causal factors.

4. Repositioning the Universities for Relevance: Policies and Options

It has been established from the foregoing that the universities in Nigeria face urgent need to be repositioned to become more relevant in the search for a viable path to national development. The chief elements would include a viable economy founded on inclusive growth that simultaneously addresses the problem of poverty, unemployment and other critical dimensions of inequalities including gender and sustainable growth. It also includes a democratic society in which a culture of transparent elections is entrenched, respect for human rights and the rule of law accorded a prime consideration. It would also, among others, be a society in which the realization of citizenship rights is possible without being mediated by ethnic, gender and class identities, but also one in which citizens are active agents of development and change.

However, at the base of repositioning the university system is the imperative of a comprehensive reform of the society including the state and the pursuit of a more nationalistic agenda deliberately designed to respond to the challenge of development. At the heart of such is the idea of bringing the state back – in to the development process. However, to avoid the tendency to romanticise the interventionist model of the post-colonial state that largely precipitated the crisis of developmental state, what is being advocated for is a democratic developmental state; that is at once developmentalist and democratic in the sense that it is accountable to the people (Edigheji, 2009).

Beyond these, there a number of policies and options that we need to consider as a part of the reform agenda in the university and tertiary education sub-sector in Nigeria. They are spelt out as follows:

- i. There is urgent need to strengthen the linkages between the Ivory Tower and policy makers for the purpose of establishing a connection research and public policy which has remained a major lacuna in the Nigeria's post-independence history. As it is presently, public policy is hardly informed by research and knowledge such that knowledge generated by the universities end up on the shelves. Although it had been advocated in the past that universities and the public bureaucracy should interact closely and establish some exchange programme the suspicion of the former by the latter has

not allowed this to happen. There is now increasing demand that public policies should be knowledge and evidence driven such that resources are allocated on the basis of established needs rather than assumptions. Unless this is so, Nigeria's performance in terms of human security will remain abysmally appalling despite the immense human and material endowment of the country. In addition, it may not be out of place to mainstream human development studies into tertiary curricula to sensitize graduates to the content of human development.

- ii. There is an urgent desire to re-introduce pedagogy into university teaching and research because it is the normative foundation of the university system especially for the arts and humanities. This tradition was lost especially at the height of military rule when a series of policies including deliberate underfunding and the intervention of the Bretton Woods institutions systematically assaulted university autonomy including the repression of academic freedom. With the additional pressure to mount courses that have market relevance especially in the private universities the problem has become more acute. Restoring the pedagogical dimension that contributes to producing graduates who have wider knowledge of the struggle for freedom and democratic rights and therefore the possibility of producing democratic citizens. Along this line, civic and citizenship education may have to be introduced as part of the general knowledge for graduates of Nigerian universities and tertiary institutions.
- iii. Nigerian universities must provide the way in the realm of action research, a space that it abdicated for a long time to the Non-Government Organization (NGO) community. Not only should we promote university-policy makers interface, we need to create synergy between university with its relatively enormous research capacity and the civil society to strengthen the latter, not only in carrying out its watch dog role but also in terms of evidence-based advocacy in the general struggle to fight corruption, promote transparency in the budget process, ensure that elections are more credible and empower the citizenry through civic and political education.
- iv. Government urgently needs to put in place policies and guidelines in the appointments of key university administrators especially vice-chancellors to stem the tide of undue ethnicization of the universities. This is possible without necessarily undermining the principle of "federal character" which is at the heart of the management of diversity in the country's plural setting. Thus, alongside enforcing existing quota and catchment policies in respect of admissions and recruitment of certain category of staff, academic positions in the universities must be strictly based on merit. But even more importantly, it is possible to implement "federal character" principle in the appointment of vice-chancellors while ensuring that qualified persons are not appointed vice-chancellors in universities located in states where they are indigenes. This could contribute to insulating crucial processes in the universities from undue local interests and pressures.
- v. Finally, universities have crucial roles to play in channeling resources to carry out research on the history and values that can reinforce national unity and cohesion. It is a matter of concern that several years after post-colonial rule, we have continued to rely on the knowledge of colonial anthropologists and linguists which is deployed by groups to exclude others as settlers and non-indigenes. The absence of indigenous knowledge and the re-writing of Nigerian history on the basis of such indigenous knowledge remains a gap which the universities must urgently address.

5. Concluding Remarks

Nigerian universities are at the cross-roads, increasingly challenged to address the crisis of relevance and reclaiming the public essence of their existence in the first place. In addressing the crisis of relevance and demonstrating relevance to issues of national development including citizenship, democratization and

national security, there are not short cuts. The private sector certainly have important role to play in university and tertiary education considering the exponential increase in the demand for tertiary education but private universities cannot be the substitute for public universities and other tertiary education.

It is important for policy makers to recognize the important role of the universities and accordingly give priority to funding, while at the same time strengthen mechanisms that promote transparent use of resources in the universities. But the most important task at the present is to have deeper reflections on the roles that universities can play in the advancement of national development which were among the key expectations at the time the universities were established in the late colonial period and in the immediate years of the country's post-independence existence. The context may have changed but universities still remain relevant in the wider struggle for democratization, democratic citizenship and development.

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