



Dakar, Senegal



Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities

COMMUNIQUE
of the
CONSULTATIVE POLICY DIALOGUE
on

**THE FUTURE AND RELEVANCE OF NIGERIAN
UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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CONTEXT

There is global understanding that higher education is a key driver of growth and development, as it engenders the creation of knowledge and innovation which are vital in steering sustainable development, including reducing poverty, improving global health, and enhancing national and global prosperity and competitiveness.

Although the number of higher education institutions in Nigeria has increased from 7 in 1962 to 323 in 2012 (number of universities from 5 to 124), this rapid growth has not necessarily led to a realization of the objectives for which the institutions were set up.

The global ranking of Nigerian universities has nose-dived considerably, and there has been growing concern over the quality of graduates from our universities. Indeed, employers are increasingly finding products of Nigerian universities unemployable, considering them as lacking in key practical and critical thinking skills.

There have also been questions on the relevance of the institutions to national development, given the paucity of research and development efforts. Unlike their counterparts in other parts of the world, our tertiary institutions have not risen up to the challenge of finding solutions to the problems of underdevelopment such as endemic poverty, hunger and disease; energy and potable water crises, deplorable roads, industrial paralysis, pervasive corruption and massive youth unemployment, as well as the problems of ethnicity and religion.

There are also concerns that universities and university education are no longer promoting democratization, nor laying enough emphasis on citizenship, resulting in their products reinforcing, rather than rejecting, old stereotypes.

Loss of faith in Nigerian universities is shown by the rush for foreign institutions even in other African countries. Nigerians reportedly spend an average of \$500 million annually in European and American universities, which is about 70 percent of the total allocation in 2008 to all federal universities.

Over the years, there has been constant restiveness including violent confrontations which characterize relationships between students and the host communities of their institutions leading to civil unrest and disruptions to the academic calendar.

Furthermore, there are challenges of weak governance structures and processes in the Nigerian Higher Education Sector. These have contributed to disruptions of the

academic calendar owing to the constant bickering between the academic staff union, and indeed other staff unions and university management and government, thereby stunting the culture of robust debate and collaborative engagement between government, university management and staff for a common vision and progress.

The tension and rancor experienced in the appointment of vice chancellors is distractive and dissipative and needs to be considerably attenuated. The appointment of indigenes of states in which Federal Universities are located as Vice Chancellors have most often contributed to eroding a culture of good governance and cohesiveness among the university community.

The origin of these problems and tendencies are to be found in the monumental onslaught on the university system by the military when they reigned on the nation, and this has contributed in no small measure to the collapse of academic cultures, and the reversal of the progress made by Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions till the early 1980s. It also owes its origin to the perverted application of the Federal character principle.

The above issues were discussed by a broad section of stakeholders and solutions proffered at a two-day Consultative Policy Dialogue on *the Future and Relevance of Nigerian Universities and other Tertiary Institutions: Towards Higher Education Transformation*, organized by TrustAfrica (an African Foundation with headquarters in Dakar, Senegal) and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (CVC). Participants at the dialogue included senior government officials, parliamentarians, Vice Chancellors and other senior administrators of universities, staff unions (Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU and National Association of Academic Technologists, NAATS), civil society groups and representatives of the private sector.

The Dialogue resolved as follows:

1. NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SUMMIT

- It was acknowledged that one of the main sources of the crisis in the Higher Education sector, especially universities, is the absence of partnership between government, management of the HEIs, unions and students bodies, which has created among others lack of trust and social dialogue. Therefore, in order to restore a culture of consultation, strategic productive engagement, and partnership/collaboration between management and staff of Nigerian higher

education institutions, and to to sustain the momentum of finding a common ground for addressing the challenges of higher education in Nigeria, it was unanimously agreed that the Consultative Policy Dialogue on Nigerian Universities and other Tertiary Institutions towards the transformation of Nigeria be held biannually to review progress made, proffer solutions to emerging challenges and enthrone sustainable knowledge-driven development, in the mould of a “**Nigerian Higher Education Summit**” which should involve all stakeholders, including federal and state governments, parliamentarians, regulatory bodies, unions in the HE sector (such as ASUU), students’ leaders, the business community and civil society organisations. The goal should be to forge a **social contract** among all the stakeholders in the sector.

2. GOVERNANCE: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

- The nature and dimension of the problems confronting higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria requires a new approach to governance. This calls for democratization of governance institutions and processes in the HE sector to among others make them more accountable, transparent, efficient and inclusive. Among other institutional reforms proposed is the need to consider the establishment of a separate ministry to cater for Higher Education to give much needed attention to the challenges facing the sector. Also, a transformation agenda of the HE sector demands cooperation and partnership between all stakeholders and vested interests in the higher education enterprise. This will minimize waste and dissipation of energy on the trivial, whilst focusing on pragmatic solutions to prevent system collapse and institutionalize a regime of revitalization in HEIs.
- In relation to the appointment of vice chancellors, there must be respect for academic excellence, managerial/leadership capabilities, transparency and accountability, and the non-negative application of the principle of federal character to stem the tide of emerging sectional agitations and clamour for indigenes and other parochial interests. As much as possible, ‘indigene-ship’ should not be critical in the appointment of Vice Chancellors.
- Participants also call for gender equity in the appointment of Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Deputy Rectors, Deans and Heads of Department. One way to encourage qualified women into leadership positions in the HE sector is to

reduce the numbers of years it takes to qualify for sabbatical. This way, they can take early sabbatical to enable them focus on research and publications.

- As a pragmatic way of developing the next generation of leaders in the HE sector, it was proposed that academics should undergo leadership and management training as they advance in their careers.
- To expedite adjudication processes in our HEIs, it is considered expedient to commission a study on an appropriate governance model, including perhaps the feasibility/possibility of establishing a judicial arm in every institution, to expeditiously deal exclusively with student and staff disciplinary matters.

3. FUNDING ISSUES

- Universities are set up to help uplift the society and humanity. They must thus be seen for their public as well as private/individual good. Government must invest in the future of the country by providing adequate resources to enable universities achieve their goals. In addition, other stakeholders, especially the private sector, should commit to investing in higher education (including sponsoring research chairs) for our common future. Basically, education as a quality enterprise is not cheap.
- In the above regard, education should not just be seen as only the responsibility of the government. Rather it must be appreciated that the very future of the nation depends on how seriously we address the issue of education, knowledge and innovation because higher education is crucial for national prosperity and progress.
- To realize the goal of Nigeria's technological advancement in the mould of the Asian Tigers, the dialogue calls for the setting up of an **EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION and DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL** to coordinate the synergy between knowledge, innovation and development in all the sectors of the economy, with multi-sectoral/inter-ministerial funding, and to manage a Research and Development Fund. All existing Funding agencies (Raw Materials Research and Development Fund, Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Petroleum Development Fund, Ecological Fund, MDG fund, etc) should be coordinated and mandated to contribute a percentage of their earnings for the exclusive funding of research in our higher institutions. The Council should be headed by the President to give it the necessary weight. The setting up of the Council would call for the National Assembly to undertake necessary amendment of statutes and Laws governing the aforementioned agencies and Funds.

- The present system of abdicating responsibility in providing adequate hostel accommodation for students in public universities is short-sighted. If government fully appreciates the importance of investment in education as other countries do (for example Ghana commits 31 percent of its budget to education as against Nigeria's eight percent), the funds for provision of more accommodation facilities will be set aside and so applied.

4. RELEVANCE TO HUMANITY AND SOCIETY

- In order to fully harness the creative/innovative energy of the teeming Nigerian youth and create a vortex of innovation, entrepreneurship and growth, to replace the present regime of hopelessness and joblessness, the entire Science and Innovation Ecosystem/complex in the country needs to be reorganized. For example firm links should be established between specialized universities and the relevant government ministries, e.g. Ministry of Science & Technology and universities of science and technology; universities of agriculture and Ministries of Agriculture, to energize incubation of creative ideas.
- To make for greater relevance of Nigerian HEIs, there is the need to intensify/deepen research engagement in our universities and other institutions of higher education to address endemic societal problems (including democratization, citizenship/nationalism, ethics/morality, poverty, food insecurity, hunger, unemployment, energy, development/underdevelopment, etc) to provide knowledge- and evidence-based solutions. Furthermore, efforts must be made to institutionalize inter-university research projects among staff and students of various universities to improve research quality and expand the horizon of staff and students.
- In the same vein, Nigerian universities must have intellectual property structures to enable them commercialize and profit from their research findings, creative works and inventions. Universities and other higher educational institutes must be mandated to create, regularly update and effectively manage a unified database of capacities, comparative advantages, outputs and niches
- Also, appropriate structures should be designed to ensure that universities and research institutes are formally linked with industry, especially in applied research and appropriation of research outputs and innovation. Government

should show leadership by promoting the utilization of knowledge and research findings.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE, ACCREDITATION & PRODUCTIVITY

- There is an urgent need to restore the integrity of higher education Institutions in terms of work ethics and morality, transparency, productivity, democratization and total commitment to the ideals of the ivory tower. The Federal Government should provide leadership in upholding the uniqueness of HEIs, while the university staff unions and the student union should work in partnership with the university leadership to enthrone a new regime of stability, revitalization and growth in all institutions. The Dialogue agreed on the need for some pragmatic reforms in curriculum and teaching methods to engender more practical, conscious and critical learning and studentship.
- It is recommended that in the running of Nigerian universities and other institutions of higher education, primacy be accorded to institutional vision as encapsulated in the institution's strategic plan. Institutional heads should align their individual personal manifestoes with this institutional vision. Furthermore, universities should have structures for self monitoring of focus, internal efficiency and quality assurance, such that self-accreditation is institutionalized.
- Government needs to be more cautious in the current trend of establishing/approving new universities without commensurate increase in the number of teachers as this has the potential of spreading available human resources in the HE sector too thin and eroding standards. Indeed, Nigeria needs to holistically plan the growth of its higher education system in terms of mix, typology and functionality in relation to relevance, niches, matching labour market, developmental needs and the desire to nurture globally competitive institutions.
- The present system of programme accreditation in our universities, particularly new universities has challenges. On the one hand, it is often ridden with inconsistencies and contradictions, while on the other, too many professional bodies also duplicate accreditation with the NUC, making it very expensive and tedious for universities. The process should be strengthened with NUC alone being statutorily empowered to co-opt other professional bodies in its accreditation. The new process of institutional accreditation should be perfected and as much as possible, internationalized by infusing assessors from

reputable universities outside Nigeria in each team. Minimum academic standards applying to all universities and other tertiary institutions should be vigorously applied.

- The hasty rush to ‘force-teach’ entrepreneurship in all HEIs may create more problems than it is trying to solve. Entrepreneurship is a knowledge system that evolves naturally overtime when conditions that encourage it exist. For example creating a ‘Songhai village environment’ stimulates students in the domain to naturally imbibe productivity traits that can be further nurtured and mentored. The dialogue therefore calls for this pragmatic and practical approach to developing the next generation of graduate entrepreneurs in all fields of study.
- The HE sector has a critical role to play in forging a sense of nationhood, and therefore nation building, as well as citizenship. To achieve this goal, courses on nation building and citizenship should be made elective foundational courses for all programmes, especially in universities.

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