

## **EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP: AN ALTERNATIVE TO PRESENT AND FUTURE OF NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORMS.**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considered "educational partnership" as an alternative to the present and future of Nigerian education system reforms. In this discourse therefore, salient issues including partnership/educational partnership, educational partnership programmes review, international academic cooperation, the Nigeria project and benefits of educational partnerships were highlighted. The paper advanced that private educational initiatives like Operation Peach All Secondary School (ORASS), Operation Reach All Primary School (ORA PS), Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI), Adopt-A - School Programme (AASP), Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEI), Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEI) and National Career Centres (NCC), are all encouraging as they are capable of making education (in Nigeria) play its role of transforming the society now and in the future. Finally, the paper concludes that maintaining the frontier in meeting the MDG's therefore, demands that stakeholders in education should adopt and imbibe the spirit of partnership.

### **Introduction**

Education is an investment for the development of the nation. As an indispensable asset, education demands active promotion by all citizens of a nation. such that within every community, there will be demand for it and when those in possession of the financial means for promoting education misuse the funds, there should be a general and sustained outcry (Maduewesi, 2005). In this regard, education should be intra and interpersonal; national and international project and not; just a government project for sustainability and accountability reasons.

Regrettably, many well-intentioned educational policies like the Universal Primary Education (UPE), 6-3-3-4 secondary school structure; and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme adopted by the Federal Government had fallen victims of the nation's chronic social and political challenges; and thus

resulted to institutional inefficiency. Egbo (2005) decries that the education sector has been marked by gross under-funding, mismanagement, inadequate infrastructural facilities, over-crowded classrooms, strikes, non-payment of salaries, sporadic closures and progressive deterioration at all levels. Indeed, education in Nigeria is at the crossroads. This informs the reform agenda by the Federal Ministry of Education under the leadership of Obiageli Ezekwesili. These reforms have strongly emphasized partnership with the private sector with a determination to make education an agent of social engineering in Nigeria.

Traditionally, child upbringing is not a mean one and in most Nigerian cultures, it is said that a child belongs to the community. With the establishment of schools and daycare centres, the responsibility has also spread to school authorities and government (Maduewesi, 2005). In this respect, partners (stakeholders) in education of a child include parents, teachers, caregivers, school nurses, community members, government at all levels, NGOs, PTAs and religious organizations among others. By implication, the entire society should therefore, partner in education of children and youths in order to ensure healthy and productive nation. In our search for “whither Nigerian education”, therefore, this paper considers “educational partnership” as possible alternative to the present and future of education in Nigeria. To this end, salient issues including partnership/educational partnership, educational partnership programme review, international academic cooperation, the Nigeria project, and benefits of educational partnership have been highlighted below.

### **Partnership/Educational Partnership**

Partnership is based on the premise that teamwork divides the efforts and multiplies the effects. One of the central aims of partnership is involving the community more closely in how local services are delivered. It refers to a single body that brings together representatives of different sectors and communities to pursue common aims. Mittler (1988) views partnership as a sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences in meeting the individual needs of school children and their families.

At the micro level (i.e. the home and school), it is believed that when parents and teachers work together, children tend to learn better than when they work in isolation (Ezeani, 2006). Another necessary partnership for the successful management of educational systems is that between families (as represented by PTAs), governments and education ministries. Open participation of actors such as parents and teachers in the education system tend to foster an improvement that is beneficial to all stakeholders. Egbo (2005) observed that pragmatic partnerships between PTAs and local governments/school districts have been a permanent feature of educational systems in the western world. Improving education in developing countries (like Nigeria) requires the development of policy guidelines that promote and support collaborations between civil agents, governments, organizations and ministries as well as the sharing of resources and information (UNESCO, 1999).

Partnership at the macro level may mean the coming together of the Governments (Federal, State, and Local), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBO), International Development Partners (IDPs) and other relevant stakeholders to execute certain projects. It could also mean the engagement of NGOs, IDPs, CBOs and other stakeholders to monitor and track implementation and sustainability of programmes. Educational partnership therefore, entails good working relationship and collaboration between stakeholders in the educational service provision for the citizens of a given society aimed at realizing ultimate education goals. It is the act of canvassing for support, for instance, physical infrastructure provision in schools by communities, alumni associations and the corporate private sectors. Specifically, it entails the forming of strategic collaborations with government, non-governmental organizations, international development partners and other relevant stakeholders that are engaged in education. Education stakeholders' partnerships play a major role in the management and organization of education in developed world. Partnerships that promote trust and accountability between governments, NGOs and other similar organizations are not only necessary financially but are critical to the entire education process (Egbo, 2005).

#### **Educational Partnership Programme Review**

For over twenty years, the U.S. Department of State's educational partnership projects have been promoting cooperation between U.S. institutions of higher learning and their counterparts around the world. Established in 1982 as the University Affiliations Programme, the cooperation has evolved into a cluster of worldwide and regionally focused programmes that strengthen academic institutions both in the United States and overseas on subjects that are of interest to the United States, other countries, and the participating institutions (Shafer, 1999). Through these programmes, the Department of State educational partnership provides funds for staff exchanges, curriculum development, collaborative research, and other activities that build competencies on both sides of the exchange in fields related to policy priorities.

Worldwide, they help establish new university departments, new degree programmes, and new curricula in fields such as business management, public administration, political science, media and journalism, legal education, civic education, liberal arts, and American studies. Shafer noted that since 1982, these institutional linkage programmes have funded more than 700 such partnerships, involving nearly 250 U.S. colleges and universities in 47 states, and higher education institutions in some 135 countries. Core funding provided through the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has leveraged at least, as much in cost-sharing from U.S. and foreign institutional partners, demonstrating their mutual commitment. The U.S. institutions involved in partnership projects include community colleges, liberal arts colleges, minority-serving institutions, and comprehensive public and private universities. Cooperation frequently builds on the experiences of teachers and administrators.

including Fulbright alumni, who are familiar with specific institutions overseas. Partnership projects broaden the impact of individual scholars through the involvement of teams of staff (mostly technical), students, and administrators to facilitate systematic reform.

In Nigeria, an Emporia State University professor, who studied and taught at Ahmadu Bello University before moving to Kansas, designed an educational partnership project to build the technological capacity of Nigerian partner institutions. His institution is now working with staff from Bayero University, Ahmadu Bello University, and the University of Maiduguri to increase the use of computers and the Internet to incorporate local and indigenous knowledge resources into their curricula, and broaden their international academic and professional networks. The project entailed seven staff exchanges, five from the Nigerian side and two staff members as well as a student, from the United States. While at Emporia, the visiting Nigerian scholars worked on individual projects, revising their curricula to reflect best practices in technology applications in information management. The visiting Americans presented technology skills workshops as well as seminars on integrating local and global resources into the design and provision of library services in Nigeria.

The partners also planned civic education workshops for organizations in the surrounding region. Collaboration among the academics led to joint conference presentations and publications. A second component of the project was the establishment of computer labs in the partner institutions in Nigeria, with computer hardware and software donated by Emporia. This has enabled both Nigerian staff and students gain technical skills, access current print and electronic literature, and communicate online with colleagues overseas, activities that were previously unavailable to them. On the American side, Emporia staff and students gained international and multicultural perspectives by interacting with their Nigerian peers. The professional and personal links developed between rural Kansas and the largely Muslim communities of Kano, Zaria, and Maiduguri will continue beyond the partnership grant period.

It is anticipated that educational partnership programme would among other benefits, have significant impact on stability and peace of the partners by strengthening civic participation in the fledgling democracy. The effectiveness of these programmes is demonstrated by the fact that similar civic education curriculum development programmes have been created by the Eurasia Foundation, the European Union, and the Peace Corps (Shafer, 1999). On the other hand, reciprocal benefits are bound to be enjoyed by participating partners as experience gained in such partnership becomes a source for scholarly publications and sharing teaching experiences. For example, the Nigerian team members visit Emporia in pairs of one senior and one junior faculty member who teach in the same areas of specialization. This facilitates the development of a mentoring relationship between them, if none already exists.

Technology training is a strong component of their training. They attend information and computer literacy classes as well as laboratory sessions to enable

them to find and retrieve information and communicate using technology both at Emporia and in Nigeria. In addition, they attend regular courses in Emporia: Foundations of Information Transfer, Theoretical Foundations of Service, Global Information Infrastructure as well as workshops, seminars or individual tutoring on curriculum revision, community analysis, grant writing and civic education. They also work with Emporia staff team in their areas of specialization. The regular courses cover issues relevant to development of the civil society such as intellectual freedom and diversity of ideas, cross-cultural communication, social and information equity and accommodation of individual and group differences. These courses are designed to raise the awareness and commitment of participants to the professional ethics germane to cultivation of civil society.

The Nigerian staff teams are mentored by their subject area colleagues in Emporia with whom they team-teach courses and discuss current developments and challenges in their fields. They also discuss and practice teaching strategies, especially those designed to meet diverse learning styles. However, the Nigerian teams are assisted with curriculum revision, design of syllabi for new courses, collection and repackaging of course materials into online formats such as WebCT, and CD-ROM, video and audio formats for on and off-line delivery. Grant writing workshops are organized US enable them to prepare competitive proposals with which they could procure additional funds to support their research and outreach missions.

Opportunities are provided for them to interact with women's and other civic organizations in Kansas; attend and possibly, present at one selected national conference related to their areas of interest. Discussions with mentors and other faculty and students at Emporia are continued on their return to Nigeria through private e-mails, or open discussion lists and the project web-site. These experiences not only reconnect them with the international scholarly and professional community, but also update their knowledge in their areas of specialization and upgrade their skills in technology, teaching methods, scholarship and programming for civil society.

Emporia exchange staff team-teaching with their Nigerian peers both in Emporia and in Nigeria and advice on implementation of new courses and curriculum. They also train research assistants, collect research data and help maintain the technology at the partner institutions in Nigeria. While there, they team-teach workshops for Nigerian civic organizations and library associations, as well as attend and possibly present at national library conferences. For instance, they planned an international library conference held in Abuja in 2004 as part of Emporia's conference series. These interactions as well as the research project, no doubts, upgrade the cross-cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes of Emporia staff team and students and enrich their curricula with knowledge of Nigerian civic organizations, reforms and information infrastructures. Joint students' projects on these and other topics build partnerships between the students, socializing them into international professional networking.

### ***Student Exchanges***

and that before long, Nigerian and U.S. students will switch campuses to be immersed in the cultures of partner institutions and countries, while learning at firsthand the cross-cultural dimensions of the global information society.

In 2001, Brandon Barnett, a SLIM graduate student who has strong technology skills and interest in global information issues accompanied the faculty team to Nigeria. While earning independent study credits by participating in this project, she initiated a linkage between the student bodies in the various institutions. She attended classes and gave presentations to her peers on student life and library education in the U.S.

While in Nigeria, Brandon Barnett assessed the state of the university and library school technology, and set up network technology units donated by SLIM with existing systems. Maintaining the technology, team-teaching technology courses, and presenting computer literacy workshops were also part of her responsibilities.

### **International Academic Cooperation**

Projects funded through the Support for East European Democracies Act (SEEDA) and the Freedom Support Act (FSA) have enabled East European and Eurasian institutions of higher learning to play a role in their countries' transitions to democracy and market economies. Similarly, projects funded under the Education for Development and Democracy Initiative (EDDI) have increased the involvement of African universities with other local and international institutions that are contributing to Africa's social, political, and economic development. Other projects, supported with funding from the U.S.-North African Economic Partnership, are assisting universities in Algeria and Tunisia in reforming university curricula to prepare their students to participate in the global economy.

Invariably, since the educational partnership programmes were founded, the international environment has been transformed by advancing technology, political changes, and economic development (Shafer, 1999). Here in Nigeria, "The Nigeria Project" is a good prototype of some educational partnership projects, whether completed, ongoing, or new, that have demonstrated their enhanced potential to contribute to global progress through understanding based on international academic cooperation. This project's framework has been presented below.

### **The Nigeria Project**

#### ***Partner institutions***

- Schools of Library and Information Management (SLIM) at Emporia State University (ESU), Kansas, U.S.A.
- Bayero University Kano

- Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
- The University of Maiduguri

**Sponsors**

- Bureau for Cultural and Educational Affairs
- College and University Affiliation Programme
- U.S. State Department

**Programme Objectives:**

***For all partner institutions***

- Establish telecommunication links between the institutions to facilitate communication for teaching, research, learning and programme administration.
- Undertake collaborative funded research to investigate the impact of civic education, community analysis, and information and computer literacy workshops on civil organizations in Nigeria.

***For Nigerian Partner Institutions***

- Provide faculty and staff members with opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills in community analysis, information and computer literacy and global studies.
- Revise the curricula to better reflect local and global perspectives.
- Organize outreach service workshops to impart civic knowledge, skills and attitudes to civic organizations in Nigeria.

***For Emporia State University***

- Foster scholarly, professional and social interactions with diverse groups of people and ideas.
- Strengthen the global studies, courses and the curriculum in general by providing information on the Nigerian and other African information infrastructures.
- Recruit international adjunct staff (teachers) to teach courses through the Internet.

**Mutual Benefits**

The activities of this programme will establish a self-sustaining partnership between the institutions: create for their students and teachers' learning environments that mirror the multicultural and global information society and contribute to the knowledge of civic organizations and reforms in Nigeria and cultivation of a global civil society.

**Global Studies and International Activities**

In 1995, School of Libraries and Information Management (SLIM) in USA advanced its commitment to globalization with the introduction of a global studies unit in the curriculum. The global courses cover international information

transfer, infrastructure development and policy, and the global information economy. Student projects in these courses include audits of national information infrastructures, some of which are posted on Globenet; a web site set up to facilitate a global dialog on SLIM's international activities seek to foster global development. One of the avenues by which this pursued is through an international conference series. In 1997, SLIM organized the second of its conference series in Warsaw, Poland, at which librarians in Central and Eastern Europe discussed the role of information in restructuring for democracy. The conference proceedings, including interviews with participants, were web-cast globally, enabling participation by information professionals in U.S.A., South Africa, and Brazil. Records of the conference presentations on web-sites and CD's are now routinely used as instructional resources.

### **The Benefits of Educational Partnerships**

Educational partnership projects are designed to benefit all partner institutions, by strengthening their capacities to teach, conduct research, administer programmes, and serve their public constituencies. For instance, American colleges and universities are uniquely poised to share their professional and academic expertise with peers in foreign institutions while at the same time, strengthening their own programmes of instruction through access to new professional networks, new research, and new perspectives on their academic fields. In this regard, the following benefits could be enjoyed from educational partnerships:

- Cooperative educational projects result in enhanced curricula such as new or improved language programmes and country study courses;
- Firsthand knowledge is gained of different world regions and new classroom techniques, which inspired them to explore and experiment with teaching approaches back home;
- Formal partnerships with international peers lead to expanded research interests in which Nigeria could conduct and publish studies that would not have been possible without the support and expertise of their overseas partners;
- Institutions with formal international partnerships hold more appeal to student applicants who increasingly seek broad international perspectives within their education to ensure their future success in the global environment;
- Partnerships create opportunities for exchange of programmes that give institutions and students the opportunity to travel outside the country for academic and research purposes;
- Joint international research advances academic and professional fields and creates enduring professional and academic networks across borders;
- Increased emphasis on international issues would attract distinguished foreign professors to Nigerian institutions to share their perspectives with faculty and students; and



- Nigeria's involvement in low-cost and highly successful partnership projects stand to engender relationships with individuals from many countries and foster positive relationships between the Nigeria nation and the rest of the world.

### **Conclusion/Way forward**

Education is the major engine of economic and social development and a force that drives a country's future (World Bank, 2002). Without functional education, therefore, Nigeria will not attain global relevance neither will it create a good society or an informed citizenry. Conversely, national development, attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) ideology become a possibility with proper educational sector.

Private educational initiatives like Operation Reach All Secondary School (ORASS), Operation Reach All Primary School (ORAPS), Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI), Adopt-A-School Programme (AASP), Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEI), Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEI) and National Career Centres (NCC), are all encouraging as they are capable of making education (in Nigeria) play its role of transforming the society now and in the future. Maintaining the frontier in meeting the MDGs therefore, demands that stakeholders in education should adopt and imbibe the spirit of partnership. Educational partnership is the most feasible option to the present and future of education in Nigeria. The FME may seek to raise the quality of infrastructure by:

- Canvassing for support on physical infrastructure provision in schools by communities, alumni associations and the corporate private sectors.
- Forming strategic partnerships with non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, international development partners and other relevant stakeholders that are engaged in education.
- Engaging NGOs, IDPs, CBOs and other stakeholders to monitor and track implementation and sustainability of programmes.
- Integrating sub-regional, regional and international initiatives for education into national plans, and encourage south-south cooperation (2<sup>nd</sup> Decade for Education in Africa 2006-2015; and Decade of Education in West Africa).
- Develop a framework for implementing the public-private partnership model for management of unity schools (through the Council Committee on Unity Schools (CCUS)).
- Create a national framework for consistent and regular inspection of schools in partnership with State Inspectorates and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs).
- Encouraging universities to collaborate with the private sector in research and development activities.
- Promoting partnership between high education institutions and industries for consultancy services to generate non-governmental sources of income.

- Creating partnerships with the private sector, donor agencies and innovation institutions to review curricula and upgrade equipment and skills of staff.

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