



Covenant University

1st
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and Speeches

...The Release of Eagles

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**Re-inventing the African
University: Paradigms for Innovation
and Change**

Text Of A Lecture Delivered By
Professor Peter Okebukola
Executive Secretary, National Universities Commission

AT THE
FIRST CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF
COVENANT UNIVERSITY, OTA,
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Professor Peter Okebukola

Preamble

Thousands of years ago, a man named Abraham (former name Abram) made a covenant with God which resulted in Abraham being the source of blessing to generations of Jews and gentiles alike. Noah, Enoch, Isaac, Jacob and numerous heroes of faith of old entered into covenant with God which resulted into spiritual and material blessings. The rule of the game is simple: meet your side of the bargain with God and He will meet His.

The God of Abraham of yesterday is the same today and evermore shall be. So He made a covenant with a hero of faith of our time Bishop David Oyedepo. The Deed of Covenant has a number of provisions one of which is the establishment of a university which will produce graduates who will turn Africa around. On His part, God is individually moulding every student of the university writing His words in tablets of stone in their hearts and assembling every cell in their mental and physical

faculties to be giants in their fields and win souls for His Kingdom. At the end of this week, the first set of such creations of God will be graduating. It is to this new generation of future leaders of Nigeria and of Africa that this lecture is dedicated.

Introduction

Africa lays claim to being the cradle of human civilisation. Aside from the remains of the earliest humans been found in Africa, evidence of what can be called ancient African science also exists in the continent. Some of the well-known contributions of ancient African science include one of the first intensive agricultural schemes; metallurgy, including the mining and smelting of copper, practised in Africa as far back as 4000 B.C.; and the system of hieroglyphic writing and the use of papyrus. The science of architecture also reached new heights with the pyramids. They were amazing accomplishments both in terms of construction and the mathematical and astronomical knowledge necessary to build and situate them.

Between 3000 and 2500 B.C., a calendar and numeration system were developed and a carefully defined medical system was established under the guidance of Imhotep, an African physician and architect. The Egyptians were responsible for many medical innovations. In addition to developing an elaborate herbal tradition and many methods of clinical therapy, they also devised a code of medical ethics. In Nigeria, evidence abounds in ancient kingdoms of advanced developments in metallurgy, architecture, mining, agriculture and medicine.

Fast-tracking to the 21st century which ushered in unprecedented challenges, in terms of the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a principal driver of growth, and the ICT revolution. Emerging also from these challenges are opportunities and prospects. The role of education in general and of higher education in particular, is now more influential than ever in the construction of knowledge in African economies and societies. Without doubt, higher education is central to the creation of the intellectual capacity on which knowledge production and utilisation depend and to the promotion of the lifelong-learning practices necessary for upgrading knowledge and skills. At the same time, it is almost dictum that the traditional mode of higher education is self-limiting. A variety of new

types of higher education institutions and new forms of learning and competition are appearing, inducing traditional education institutions to change their modus operandi and delivery and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new knowledge economy and societies, propelled by the expanding frontiers of ICT.

This understanding has been acknowledged and incorporated by the World Bank within its Africa Action Plan for 2006-2008 (Canning and Chan, 2006). This Plan highlights several roles for higher education under the Bank's strategic objective of building skills for growth and competitiveness, including the provision of relevant skills to the labour market; a capacity to understand and use global knowledge in science and technology, particularly for agriculture; a capability to assess existing information and generate new understanding through research; and a much closer working relationship with the productive sectors of the economy. In general, the Plan reaffirms the fundamental importance of a more balanced and strategic approach to human capital development in an effort to boost the prospects for economic growth in Africa.

In this lecture we will begin with a review of the development of university education in Africa. Next, we will assess the contributions of universities to Africa's development making particular note of why the universities have failed in accelerating the pace of development in the region. The third part of the lecture will propose strategies for "re-inverting" the African University within the contexts of innovation and change. The concluding section will locate Covenant University within the framework of this paradigm shift.

Development of University Education in Africa

One of the oldest universities in the world is located in Africa. The Al-Azhar University, Cairo was founded in 988 AD in response to the quest for knowledge, inspiration for research and need to train scholars in medicine, Islamic literature and art as well as building technology for which Egypt has an early global fame.

For over 400 years after Al-Azhar University was established, there was a lull in higher education development in the region. The lull was occasioned in part by colonization and slave trade. Colonisation in the

19th century depressed local efforts at high-level human resource development. The colonial masters were satisfied with training mainly middle-level personnel from secondary-level institutions. The slave trade, of course, hampered development in all its ramifications. Thus, with the abolition of slave trade and the granting of independence, the pace of higher education development began to quicken.

Post independence university development saw examples in West Africa (Legon in Ghana), and East Africa (Makerere in Kenya). This development was in response to producing high-level manpower to fill the vacancies left by the colonial administration. It was also to produce a new generation of leaders for the newly independent states and skilled personnel to drive the economy. African universities established in the 1960s rose stoutly to this challenge. Graduates from these universities contributed significantly to the early development of African nations.

A change in story is noteworthy beginning from early 1960s. As Holtland and Boeren (2006) noted, shortly after independence the situation looked bright for universities in sub-Saharan Africa. Economic growth was good and (national) universities were seen as essential for the development objectives of nation building and manpower planning. Their role and position were clear: they were autonomous, and they had to educate the future leaders of the nation. The number of students in higher education was minimal: in 1960 there were 30.000 students; in 1975 some 180.000. Gradually, however, they came to be seen as an expensive colonial heritage delivering too theoretical graduates. The concept of "Development University" was introduced: universities had to contribute directly to the short-term development goals of the nation. Undergraduates had to do community work and separate institutions were created to address practical, multidisciplinary issues (e.g. integrated rural development or public health). Hence, with declining funding to the universities, deterioration set in to the infrastructure and delivery systems. Staff salaries became less competitive, leading to brain drain.

Yet another change in story. At the end of the 1970's sub-Saharan Africa was hit by a serious economic crisis: terms of trade declined sharply

and many countries suffered from corrupted political elites. Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) forced governments to curtail expenditures on social services, like health and education. The higher education sector was hit very hard as enrolments increased while budgets were reduced. In 1995 1.75 million students were enrolled, nearly ten times as much as in 1975, while the share of higher education in the education budgets fell from 19.2% in 1980 to 16.7% in 1995 (Holtland and Boeren, 2006). Donors reduced their support as well; e.g. the percentage for higher education in the education portfolio of the World Bank dropped from 17% in 1985-89 to 7% in 1995-1999. As a result the budgets per student declined sharply. As students and staff revolted, they were increasingly seen as a political threat to the status quo. Starving higher education institutions from funds enabled political elites to subdue them to their own political ends; compromising ethical, scientific and educational standards. All this made it virtually impossible for the universities to live up to the earlier expectations and they were increasingly seen as a luxury Africa could not afford. However, by 2000, the economics of many of the African countries had started to pick up. The forces of globalization also began to take root. The knowledge society started to emerge. Within these contexts, the African university started to rise to emerging challenges.

As stated earlier, in the second half of the 1990's economic growth picked up again. Donors started to use the Sector Wide Approach in education. In return for budget support, donors demanded governments to increase their budget for UPE and they did so. At the same time the numbers of secondary schools leavers continued to grow rapidly and tracer studies showed that graduates had much better chances on the labour market than secondary school leavers. Political pressure to increase enrolment rates at higher education institutions grew quickly. In several countries enrolments in higher education tripled or quadrupled in the last fifteen years. As the demand exceeded the capacity, new private (for-profit and non-profit) higher education institutes were created and reforms of the existing ones became inevitable. World Bank financed reforms at major universities stimulating them to develop strategic institutional development plans. Aided by the democratisation process that swept across the continent, this led to better managed and more efficient higher education

institutions. Critics point out that in this process quantity prevailed over quality. The idea that a university is a place of critical reflection has been replaced by the idea that universities have to supply what markets are demanding. In sum, chronic lack of funds is still the major problem for most universities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Success Stories of African Universities

Though relatively young, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa have accomplished much. They have grown from just six institutions in 1960 to more than 300 in 2006, with a corresponding rise in enrolment. In some cases, they have developed relevant curricula and revised their content to reflect African priorities. They have also largely replaced expatriate staff with indigenous staff, and fostered intellectual communities. A major achievement has been to produce the skilled human resources required to staff and manage public and private institutions in the newly independent states (Saint, 2002). In South Africa, Stellenbosch University was the first teaching institution in the world to design and launch a satellite. The project focused on designing a curriculum intended to help solve specific problems such as developing new products or improving the environment, and not to simply produce graduates (Juma, 2005).

Africa's reconstruction challenges require creating the technical competence needed to design and manage infrastructure projects. The Kigali Institute of Science, Technology and Management (KIST) in Rwanda shows how higher education institutions can help transform the communities in which they are located.

Another shining example of business 'incubation' is the University of Zambia. This was the midwife of Zamnet, the country's largest Internet provider. Zambia's experience demonstrates that universities have great potential for creativity and innovation, even under the most difficult financial conditions. Numerous Brazilian universities have adopted a similar approach as part of their regular mission.

In Uganda, Makerere University has developed a new approach to teaching that enables students to contribute significantly to the solution of public health problems in their communities. Several other African universities are involved in similar social outreach activities.

In Nigeria, University of Ibadan has blazed the trail in the treatment of malaria while the immunobooster of University of Jos is reported to be effective in the Management of HIV/AIDS patients. University of Lagos has become world renowned for its special building materials for urban housing development.

In the course of their brief history, the thinking about the role of universities has also evolved. In Francophone Africa, the early classical academic approach is giving way to a more utilitarian orientation. As regards Anglophone universities, governments have tended to encourage a technocratic definition of their role, which has been reinforced by the current economic crisis on the continent. Also, a growing number of African observers see a potential for universities to build upon the strengths of traditional culture so as to modernise in a positive, indigenous fashion.

Saint (2002) further notes that “there is much to suggest that African universities are nearing the end of their initial phase of development. Their mandates at the time of independence now require reassessment as a result of changes in the world, in Africa, and in the universities themselves”. Internationally, the emergence of global markets has created a competitive world economic system characterized by rapid knowledge generation and technological innovation. These changes affect local labour markets and the types of skills they require. Within Africa, high population growth rates and increased access to education have boosted the social demand for higher education, leading to rising university enrolment and a proliferation of tertiary institutions. Universities have also changed, becoming mass-based and diversified institutions operating under severe financial constraints. In many countries, conditions which engender these second generation issues have deteriorated to the point where the need for action is now urgent.

The University Africa Needs in the 21st Century

What Africa needs is a new generation of universities that can serve as engines of economic development and social renewal. This requires a

major paradigm shift on the part of governments, academia, business, and civil society to overhaul higher education, and put it squarely in the service of African people. Qualitatively, universities will have to reconsider their visions, missions, goals, functions, and structure. Drastic reforms shall be needed in curriculum design, pedagogy and criteria for student selection. This shall require nothing less than being committed to thinking and operating at the frontiers of institutional innovation. Innovations in higher education are taking place everyday in Africa, and other parts of the developing world. Therefore, there exists already a strong basis from which we can learn. We wish to argue, that it is the fundamental role of universities to nurture creativity and innovation. Countries that appreciate this fact, have adopted strategies conducive to their respective milieu. And in so doing have achieved impressive results. In the United States, it is routine for universities to incubate businesses (e.g Silicon Valley), while on the other hand, in Asia the private sector is an important incubator of universities (e.g Pohang Steel Company established the Pohang Science and Technology University (POSTECH). In Brazil, Rio's Potinical University created the Genesis Institute for the strategic purpose of producing both graduates and enterprises. We must emphasize, at this point that curriculum reform is key achieving the milestones that have just been cited. It is also vital to nurturing and adaptive generation of professionals. What do these examples tell us? Well, some of them are a result of isolated initiatives; others are from strategic academic entrepreneurship; others are from government, and/or private sector foresight; and some have resulted from serendipity.

The challenge for Africa is not just to seek more funding. While this is important, the challenge for us is to have the courage to redefine higher education, and make it a force for sustainable development. We must move away from an environment of simply being tenacious to an environment capable of realizing the development role of our universities. Nothing will happen unless our government policies realize the strategic role that universities can play in harnessing the world's fund of scientific and technological knowledge for development. There are several approaches to ameliorating our situation. The most crucial is to promote reform in existing universities to allow them to

bring research, training and outreach activities to the service of society. For example, universities located in urban areas should ideally, forge ties with municipal authorities to help solve the socio-economic and environmental challenges that those authorities face.

Although we bemoan our deplorable infrastructure, we have yet to tap on the capacity of our existing universities to promote infrastructure development. Departments of civil engineering at our universities ought to be intricately involved with all phases of road construction and maintenance. But existing university policies and regulations must be enhanced to allow them to be flexible to accommodate development functions. This is especially opportune because many governments are currently reviewing many applications for setting up new universities. This provides a wonderful opportunity for shaping curricula, and identifying the most ideal geographic locations for performing developmental tasks. Changing university missions in order to allow them to serve the community shall also require widespread international partnerships. Multilateral and bilateral partners will need to complement their current focus on primary education with a new vision for higher education. In turn, African countries will need to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development by providing incentives that bring higher education to the service of socio-economic development. In order to realise the contribution of science and technology to development, critical adjustments in governments per se shall be required. We wish to argue, that executive leadership in national and local government operates without adequate guidance on the role of science, technology, and innovation. There are several options for overcoming this impasse, but one is to establish offices of science and technology advice in offices charged with sustainable development issues. Such offices could be established in the President's office, specific Ministries, as well as local and regional bodies (Wakhunga, 2006).

In addition we need to harmonise the missions of higher education institutions with sustainability goals. Urban universities are capable of adjusting their curricula and pedagogy, for example, to address the challenges of sanitation faced by slum dwellers. On the other hand universities located in rural areas could serve as centres of excellence

for the management of natural resources. Universities ought to work more closely with the private sector in sustainable development activities. Promoting enterprise development, especially in urban areas, is an effective way of eradicating poverty. This shall require designing programmes for enterprise creation and development.

The simplest way of reforming curricula is to do away with outmoded practices, and to adopt new approaches that encourage creativity, and entrepreneurship. These reforms must include close collaboration with the private sector. Here, the Nigerian example of entrepreneurial studies for all undergraduates is worth citing. Universities must also be allowed to enjoy greater autonomy in administration practices so that they can adapt in a timely manner to a dynamic world. These changes are needed urgently because many African universities are in danger of becoming marginalised, and their status in society will ultimately continue to decline.

The starting point, of reversing this trend, is to agree on initial priorities based on feasibility and potential for technological learning and adaptation. Knowledge is increasingly globalised, therefore the consultations ought to include international expertise especially Africans in the Diaspora, whose hegemony in R&D, business, and government is expanding. It is in this way, that universities and institutions of higher learning shall be poised to play their role in meeting the Millennium Development Goals

On most indicators of development, sub-Saharan Africa is lowly rated relative to other regions of the world. To be elevated from the bottom of development league tables, the citizenry turn to education. Education is seen as the tool for breaking the shackles of ignorance and poverty which hold the region in bondage (Obasanjo, 2006). Both basic and higher education are seen to play individual and collective roles in the development of human resources. Within this context, the role of the university for high-level human resource development is pivotal. So, what kind of university does Africa need to assure rapid socio-economic and political development in the 21st century.

In characterising the type of university Africa needs, it is instructive to

lay out the problems facing the region to which we desire university education. Poverty, high illiteracy rate, poor governance, health problems (notably malaria, HIV/AIDS, high infant and maternal mortality) as well as drought/famine, have persistently occluded development.

The African Union crafted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to counter these development threats. At the global level to which Africa subscribes, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also take on board the resolution of these problems. The university Africa needs must be able to contribute to solving the problems facing the region. Examples of how this can be achieved are worth citing.

Fighting poverty: Poverty is brought about by a multiplicity of factors chief of which is the lack of skills to create employment or be employed. The abundance of natural resources in Africa is legendary, yet the region is one of the poorest in the world. Human resource development through education is at the heart of production and harnessing of natural resource endowments, hence the antidote to poverty. The universities should contribute towards fighting poverty through the production of entrepreneurial graduates who will create jobs and engage the citizenry in gainful employment. Quality teacher training for basic education is another. Basic education is key for fighting poverty. Universities train graduate teachers who in turn offer training for teachers of basic education. Without the universities playing this role effectively, success of the basic education delivery system will be hindered.

Fighting illiteracy: Literacy rate of African countries is one of the lowest in the world. NEPAD and MDGs have the pursuit of Education for All (EFA) as one of their cardinal goals. EFA is to be achieved through a combination of formal and non-formal interventions. UNESCO has established a strong link between attainment of EFA and the development of a virile higher education system (UNESC, 2003). As stated earlier, the universities produce the high-level human resources for delivering, managing and quality assuring basic education on which EFA rests. African universities need to contribute to fighting illiteracy

in the region through teacher training and the training of managers and inspectors. Thus Africa needs universities with faculties/institutes of education that will produce quality teachers for driving the basic education system.

Addressing health problems: Africa needs universities that will focus medical education on persisting and emerging health problems. The dearth of health workers will need to be addressed through accelerated production of such personnel in the right quantity and quality. Malaria, tuberculosis and other persisting diseases require home-grown solutions with support of international partners. The regime of local research into finding cures for these diseases will need to be catalysed by African universities. African universities need to collaborate with researchers from developed countries to find a cure for HIV since the region is the most battered by the pandemic. A combination of education and health interventions will need to be applied by the universities to bring down the unacceptably high infant and maternal mortality rates.

Fighting environmental problems: Drought, famine, flooding, pollution and desertification are some of the environmental problems facing Africa to which African universities are positioned to tackle through research and environmental education. Africa needs universities that will be in the forefront of research for solving national and regional environmental problems. The citizenry needs to be made aware of the implications of their behaviours for local and global environments. The message of sustainable development needs to be conveyed more stridently by African universities through environmental education.

Production of better quality leaders and followers: In the 21st century, Africa needs a new breed of leaders who have national and regional interests at heart. Leaders who are not selfish, corrupt and who firmly embrace the ideals of democracy. Equally needed is a followership that is disciplined, honest, God-fearing and who have love of country at heart. Africa needs universities for producing these kinds of leaders and followers. Regardless of the discipline of study, the university curriculum should inculcate the right values in the future leadership and the followership.

Profile of the African University of the 21st Century

From the foregoing, it is useful at this point to build a profile of the African University of the future. The dots in this profile which are to be linked include the following:

Access: the university will offer education to all those who are eligible and have successfully completed secondary education. It will not discriminate on the basis of gender, religion and ethnic affiliation, socio-economic status, and physical challenges. The university will attract foreign students and staff a mix that will be promote interchange of ideas and cultural values. Whereas access is broad-based, a process for selecting the brightest from the secondary education system is advisable in order to guarantee quality students and ultimately quality graduates. The Nigeria example of conducting a screening exercise after the Universities Matriculation Examination (UME) is worthy of regional adoption.

Whereas the appetite for university education is increasing, available spaces cannot cope with the demand. The African university of the 21st century is seen as one with open and distance learning delivery system that can offer quality education to large numbers at moderate cost.

Quality: Quality should be the hallmark of Africa's university of the future. Of concern should be the quality of the input (e.g. students, staff, facilities and curriculum), process (e.g. teaching-learning interactions, management and use of resources) and outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes of the graduates). The university we envision should have quality assurance embedded into every segment of its operations.

ICT-driven: ICT is playing a pivotal role in the delivery of university education worldwide. This role will persist far into the future. The profile of the African university of the future would be incomplete without a mesh of ICT infrastructure and use. Hence for teaching, learning and research, the African university will engage ICT as a platform. Today, the level of engagement is low thus justifying a call for more rigorous application. Significant efforts are being made at the national and regional levels to hike the use of ICT in African universities.

Research: While the research profile of African universities took a dip

in the 1980s and 90s, a steady growth is discernible beginning from 2000. In the near future, research will gain greater prominence in the activities of African universities. The need to improve research infrastructure and human capacity can, therefore, not be overstressed.

Agriculture and Rural Development: Africa is largely agrarian and rural. Agriculture needs to be intensively developed to guarantee food sufficiency and food security. Accent will need to be given by African universities to programmes that will accelerate food production by way of training of agriculturists and extension workers. How the rural areas can be rapidly developed should also be priority for research and action by the African university community.

Funding and Management: The African University of the 21st century will brandish a funding profile that will be multifaceted, with decreasing dependence on proprietor subvention. Overall funding level is expected to increase with input from stakeholders including endowments, tuition and user charges. Development partners and the private sector are expected to be active contributors to this profile. Management is expected to be innovative and entrepreneurial.

Innovations and change required to drive the vision

If African Universities are to rise to the challenge of a globalised world and a knowledge economy, there are adjustments that need to be made to their operations. Innovation and change will be the hallmark of the re-positioning. Key elements of this new look are briefly described below.

Innovation in funding: A variety of cost-sharing approaches will have to be adopted if funding level is to match the needs of the institution. Since there is a high chance of a gradual retreat of the state from fully funding the universities, university managers will need to work with parents, students and other stakeholders to generate the required funds for quality teaching and research. Some viable options include endowments, commercialisation of services through consultancies and mounting of purely demand-driven courses.

Innovations in Governance: Two types of managers should drive the re-invented African university the academic and the entrepreneur. The

Vice-Chancellor should be 50% scholar, 50% entrepreneur. His/her deputies should be thorough-bred academics. The credentials of the Vice-Chancellor as a fund-raiser and mobiliser of resources should be impeccable. He/she is the roving fund-raising ambassador for the institution. The day-to-day academic operations should be left to the deputies who are scholars of repute, steeped in academic tradition. The overall governance is in the hands of Council that is made up of a rich mixture of private sector, development partner, academic and proprietor representation.

Shift should be from state control to state supervision. Institution should work strictly with strategic plans and with formal and informal systems of authority and accountability enshrined.

Innovations in curriculum and curriculum delivery: Total overhaul of the curriculum is imperative. The thrust of the improvement is the jettisoning of old concepts and programmes and the introduction of contemporary issues and programmes that will lead to the production of nationally relevant, entrepreneurial and globally competitive graduates. The delivery system should be ICT driven, taking full advantage of new and emerging technologies with elearning as focus.

Innovations in access: The thrust of the new vision in access is to open up to private providers. This is the observable trend in several African countries, a trend that is proposed to continue in the coming years. This means the establishment of more private universities. The monitoring of such universities for compliance with minimum academic standards is worth stressing.

Open and distance learning will need to be given greater visibility while cross-border providers require rules of engagement and monitoring as prescribed by the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Cross-border Provision of Higher Education. In order to take pressure off the universities, non-university higher education institutions should be expanded and made attractive for students through incentives and post graduation remuneration.

Innovations in Quality Assurance: Both programme and institutional accreditation should be a feature of the university system in Africa in

the coming years. The common practice is to conduct either programme or institutional accreditation with their separate strengths and weaknesses. Together, the two forms will establish a tighter regime of quality assurance for the system (Okebukola and Shabani, 2006).

Another direction to which attention should turn is the establishment of quality assurance units at the institutional level as well as agencies at the national level. The establishment of sub-regional and regional networks of the national quality assurance agencies has been advocated. This is an innovation in the region that will foster resource sharing and collaborate among the agencies.

Converting brain drain to brain gain: Innovative strategies for harnessing the huge human resources of Africans in the diaspora have been described by UNESCO (Seddoh, 2006). Most of the strategies attempt to strengthen the links of the experts with institutions in their home countries rather than get them to come back home immediately. An example of one of such strategies is the NUC's Nigerian Experts and Academic in the Diaspora Scheme (NEADS). NEADS aims at bringing Nigerians in the Diaspora who are experts in selected areas of national priority such as medicine, engineering and oil and gas to offer teaching and research service in the Nigerian university system. Duration of engagement ranges between one month and one year. On return to their overseas base, these experts maintain active academic linkage with the host Nigerian institutions. Over the past two years, NEADS has fostered significant academic development in the university system.

Innovations in ICT enabled delivery of university education: elearning protocols need to be adopted by African universities in order to enhance flexible learning and to foster interactively. Issues of bandwidth, connectivity, infrastructure and appropriate regulatory regimes are gladly being addressed in most African countries. Within this context, the adoption of digital libraries in African universities is gaining increasing acceptance.

The Nigerian Example

After the foregoing regional review, it is useful to narrow down by providing an example of on-going efforts at repositioning the university

system at the national level. The case in point is Nigeria. Since 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo has continued to challenge the Nigerian university system to shake off its garb of obsolescence and prepare to rise to world-class status. Through the instrumentality of the National Universities Commission (NUC), government's quality assurance agency with statutory responsibility for inter alia, setting of national minimum academic standards for all disciplines taught in the Nigerian University System as well as the accreditation of all degrees and academic awards, has continued to make policy and implement intervention projects targeted at enhancing the quality of the teaching, research and community service activities of Nigerian universities. This is with the aim of ensuring that they are sufficiently empowered and motivated to produce globally competitive and entrepreneurial graduates who can be key players in driving the nation's socio-economic and technological development. The major and minor surgical operations will now be described in brief (see Borishade and Okebukola, 2006 for details)..

Student input:

Expansion of Access to University Education: At inception of the Obasanjo administration in 1999, Nigeria had 25 federal universities, 13 state universities and 3 private universities. In its quest to expand access to university education, the Federal Government has licensed 24 private universities. It re-opened the National Open University of Nigeria and approved a new campus for University of Benin at Effurun. Furthermore, the number of state universities has increased from 11 to 26. It is also instructive that total student enrolment in the universities which was 300,618 in 1999 now stands at about 750,235.

Carrying Capacity/Admission Quota: NUC conducted a survey which determined the carrying capacity of universities for students. The aim essentially is to match student enrolment with available human and material resources to forestall over-enrolment. The results from the carrying capacity survey informed determination of admission quotas to curb over-enrolment and ensure that universities only admit the number of students that their physical facilities and staff can adequately support for the production of good quality university graduates. The fruits of these reforms will expectedly be manifest in the

quality of the 2008/2009 graduates.

Post-UME Screening: Universities had reported poor correlation between performance in the classroom and UME results especially among candidates with the higher UME scores. This has contributed to the poor quality of university graduates in Nigeria. In order to ensure good quality new entrants (input) into the Nigerian universities, Government introduced post-UME screening with effect from the 2005/2006 academic session. The objective of this reform is to ensure that only deserving candidates who would be able to benefit themselves and society from participation in higher education are admitted to the universities.

Teacher Input

Virtual Institute for Higher Education Pedagogy (VIHEP): The Virtual Institute for Higher Education Pedagogy (VIHEP) is aimed at contributing to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in Nigerian universities. The Institute is a training site where participants are able to update their knowledge and skills on a subject matter using Internet protocols as platform. The nine-module training programme has the following objectives:

- To provide academic staff in tertiary institutions in Nigerian especially universities with Internet-based training on modern methods of teaching and learning in higher education.
- To enhance the knowledge and skills of academic staff on such subjects as (a) teaching of large classes; (b) effective utilization of (limited) resources; (c) modern methods of assessment and evaluation of student's performance; (d) basic skills of curriculum development; and (f) techniques for writing grant winning proposals.
- To share experience among academic staff in Nigerian universities on best practices in university teaching and how to deal with academic vices such as examination malpractice, cultism and plagiarism.

The VIHEP training programme has drawn a large number of participants across the Nigerian universities.

Special doctoral studies scholarships for university teachers: As part of efforts to improve the quality of academic staff in Nigerian universities, NUC is forging linkages and entering into cooperation agreements with a number of foreign embassies and international organisations to secure scholarships for academic staff in the Nigerian university system to pursue studies leading to the award of the Ph.D degree.

Improved welfare scheme for university staff: In 2001, a 22% increase in the salaries of university staff was approved across the board. This translated to one of the best salary schemes for university staff in Africa. Efforts are still being made to review the welfare of university staff across the system in order to attract top-flight scholars from Europe and North America to teach in Nigerian universities as was the case in the early 60s and 70s.

The Nigerian Experts and Academics in the Diaspora Scheme (NEADS): NEADS was instituted to enhance teaching and research in Nigerian universities through the participation of Nigerian experts and academics who were brain-drained. The scheme kicked off with the visit to Nigeria of Professor Gabriel Oyibo of the God Almighty Grand Unified Theorem (GAGUT) fame who travelled to selected universities in the six geo-political zones delivering lectures and interacting with members of the academic community in each institution. Another distinguished Nigerian Professor Ferdinand Ofodile, a professor of cosmetic surgery in the United States was also in the country in December, 2005 as part of the NEADS scheme. Professor Tayo Akinwande of MIT is to visit in August 2006 to train Nigerian university scholars and heads of departments in modern methods of teaching and research in computer science and engineering.

Other quality promotion and enhancing practices include the Nigeria Expatriate Supplementation Scheme (NESS) which was also put in place to promote the attraction and retention of foreign expert academics in hardship areas into the Nigeria university system. There is also the Best Practices in University Teaching project (BESPUT). This project was introduced to promote the dissemination of teaching by identified experts in particular fields across the university system.

Curriculum Input

A primary purpose of University education is the production of quality high-level manpower to propel national development. From the early beginnings of university education, the hope of Nigerian universities has been the production of quality graduates whose standards would be comparable to international standards. From the mid-eighties however, there has been a steady decline in the standards of education and quality of graduates. Both employers of labour and the international community have increasingly expressed concern and disappointment about the quality of university graduates. This is illustrated by the insistence by foreign-based universities that Nigerian university graduates wishing to pursue graduate studies should undertake remedial courses. Similarly, there has been persistent outcry by employers of labour about the dismal performance and lack of knowledge and critical skills by the graduates.

Thus, in August 2004, the NUC embarked on the critical path of revising the curriculum of Nigerian Universities to make it more responsive to national needs through the development of Benchmark and Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS). The needs assessment exercise is a standard prelude to fulfil the unmet needs of the labour market. The BMAS progressively incorporated international perspectives and experiences in undergraduate courses taught in our universities, including the e-learning concept in the curricula. We also have entrepreneurial studies as a compulsory offering for all undergraduates. It is expected that when the revised curricula come into effect in the next academic session, they will significantly respond to the needs of the labour market and the society in general.

In its bid to further ensure that Nigerians are guaranteed quality university education in an expanded university system with new private and state universities adding to the stock, the National Universities Commission established a full-fledged Department of Quality Assurance to anchor this all important assignment.

Establishment of New Academic Programmes: Government has intensified efforts to ensure that universities obtain prior NUC approval

before establishing new academic programmes. Such approval is only given after rigorous resource verification and appraisal has confirmed readiness of the institution with the requisite human and material resources for qualitative prosecution of the proposed programme. This measure has curbed the practice in the past of universities making shoddy arrangements for commencement of new programmes (Ramon-Yusuf, 2003).

Encouraging Universities to focus on programmes where they have strength and not duplicate courses offered elsewhere: This is aimed at the gradual evolution of centres of excellence that stand high chance of earning the university a good rank. This is being achieved through the imposition of a ban on programmes that earn denied accreditation and the encouragement of proprietors to gradually phase out such programmes and concentrate their resources on improving programmes in which they have competitive advantage. In addition, efforts are being made to encourage some of the first generation universities to focus more on postgraduate training and research.

Benchmarking of university curricula with international standards: Cognisant of the need to improve the relevance of university education to national development and global competitiveness, NUC organized a series of workshop leading first to the evolution of outcome-based Benchmark standards, the development of curriculum on entrepreneurial education and then a merger of the revised content-based Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) with the outcome-based Benchmark statements in all the thirteen academic disciplines taught in the Nigerian university system to facilitate the production of globally competitive and entrepreneurial graduates. One of the key outcomes of the curriculum review efforts, is the introduction of compulsory entrepreneurial studies of 4 credit units for all undergraduates in the Nigerian University system irrespective of their course of studies

Facilities

Rehabilitation of infrastructure: After decades of neglect, infrastructural facilities in the universities have run down considerably.

A policy on the rehabilitation of such facilities was instituted in 2002. In the application of this policy in 2004, the sum of N12 billion was provided as capital grants for federal universities to address their numerous uncompleted academic buildings as well as rehabilitate the existing ones. Provision has been made in the 2005 budget in continuation of the prosecution of this policy.

Presidential Intervention In Hostel Development and Management: Concerned about the deplorable state of hostel accommodation in Nigerian universities, President Olusegun Obasanjo convened an unprecedented meeting of all Proprietors and Management staff of all Nigerian Universities (Federal, States and Private) with Chief Executive Officers of banks, multinational oil companies, insurance companies and other private sector operators with the purpose of getting the private sector to partner with Universities to put up hostels on mutually agreeable terms. This evoked tremendous responses with the result that many hostels have sprung up and continue to do so in all Nigerian Universities. The new found partnership between the University system and the Organised Private Sector will undoubtedly yield fruitful results in reducing antisocial behaviours in our students and by implication improved quality of learning. Government has gone further to hand over the management of all hostels in Federal universities to professional estate managers in order to provide good quality hostels that are suitable for both local and foreign students.

Library Reforms: Establishment of a National Digital Library: The Virtual (Digital) Library Project is a response to the dearth of library resources in our universities. The objectives of the project include:

- To improve the quality of teaching and research in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria through the provision of current books, journals and other library resources;
- To enhance access of academic libraries serving the education community in Nigeria to global library and information resources;
- To enhance scholarship, research and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collection;
- To provide guidance for academic libraries on applying

appropriate technologies used in the production of digital library resources; and

- To advance the use and usability of globally distributed, network of library resources.

At present over several locally published and foreign journals and books are available online on the site. The library currently runs on www.nigerianvirtuallibrary.com.

Funding

The level of funding for recurrent and capital expenditure has increased significantly especially in the last five years. For instance, recurrent grants to federal universities and inter-university centres steadily increased from N10,362,430,272 in 1999 through N53,051,218,784 in 2005 and over N75 billion in 2006. Capital grants increased from N1,469,500,000 in 1999 to N11,973,328,699 in 2004. Apart from such phenomenal increases in the level of funding, staff emoluments for federal institutions quadrupled during the period. Furthermore, Government has ensured regular and prompt payment of personnel costs.

Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost Grant (DTLC): In 2004 we had the introduction of the Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost grant (DTLC) which is aimed at funding procurement of consumables and maintenance of equipment in laboratories. DTLC is aimed at ensuring that students stay actively engaged in productive academic work and lead to the improvement in the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities by putting an end to the era of 'alternative to practical' occasioned by lack of laboratory reagents and other consumables. There is ample evidence that the introduction of DTLC has impacted positively on the quality of teaching. This innovation has brought a new lease of life for the laboratories, studios and workshops in federal universities and has significantly improved the ability of teachers and students to carry out research as well as hands-on laboratory, workshop and field work as provided in the university curricula. This grant is gradually transforming the laboratories in the universities from their previously dysfunctional state to powerful functional tools for teaching, learning and research with expectations of profound positive impact on quality of the graduates.

Teaching and Research Equipment Grant(TREG): Following the introduction of DTLC in 2004, university teachers remarked on the poor state of equipment in many laboratories to which the DTLC grant was to provide supporting consumables. Consequently, NUC made a case to government for the provision of an annual special grant for at the next ten years for the purchase of new teaching and research equipment to synergize the positive impact of DTLC grant so that laboratories, workshops, studios and farms in Nigerian universities can be restored to their past glory thus making to measure up to facilities in world-class universities. Provision for TREG was made in the 2005 and 2006 budgets with allocations to federal Universities ranging from N33 million to N117 million. Government plans to make sustained provision of the TREG for ten years to enable acquisition of modern teaching and research equipment by federal universities to bring these laboratories to world-class standard.

Process

Teaching: ICT-enabled delivery of instruction is being promoted in all universities. While gains made so far are not as impressive, the good news is that we are on a steady course towards enhancing teaching and learning using ICT as tool.

Research:

Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair (NURESDEF): This is a reform aimed at: (a) exhibiting innovative research projects and their products from Nigerian universities to industry and the public; (b) highlighting innovations and creative efforts of Nigerian universities in research and development; (c) providing opportunities for networking and collaboration among academic researchers, institutions and between them and industry as well as with institutions abroad, (d) provide a forum for industry to select research outputs for further development for mass production and commercialisation; and e) provide platforms and avenues for attracting support for ongoing development oriented research from the private sector and international development agencies. The second edition of NURESDEF was held in December, 2005 with ample evidence that the Fair is achieving the desired objectives and impacting positively on the

research mandate of the universities

Central Research Fund (CRF) Scheme: the main purpose of the Central Research Fund Scheme is to fund top quality multidisciplinary and inter-institutional priority research from the Universities for national development. Following the recommendation of a Reviewers Workshop in November, 2002, a total of 10 proposals were funded from the scheme. It is to be noted that this scheme is without prejudice to the normal research grant allocations to Universities as it is aimed at individual researchers rather than institutions. The Scheme will undoubtedly result in improved research quality in the Universities.

Nigerian University Doctoral Theses Award Scheme (NUDTAS): The Nigerian University Doctoral Theses Award scheme (NUDTAS) was instituted as another means of encouraging high quality research among doctoral students in the Nigerian university system.

Ranking of Universities: The logical sequence of the improved and systematic accreditation of academic programmes was the ranking of Nigerian universities. The ranking scheme was instituted in 2002 to stimulate healthy competition among our universities, enhance the evolution of centres of excellence in Nigeria and prepare them for global ranking of universities. This exercise, which has received commendation from development partners, e.g. UNESCO, is designed to expose Nigerian universities to the frontiers of international competitiveness. The result of the latest ranking, using the globally acceptable indicators for conducting university ranking, will put forward the first 20 universities for the world ranking of universities for 2005. Ranking of universities using governance indicators has yielded results for Best Vice-Chancellor and Best Council Awards.

Accreditation of Academic Programmes: NUC carried out a comprehensive accreditation exercise in 1999/2000 to assess the quality of 1,204 academic programmes across the thirty six universities. The November 2005 comprehensive accreditation exercise was the third in the annals of programme quality assessments in the Nigerian university system. There has been significant improvement in the quality of university programmes since 1999. Whereas only 11% of the

programmes assessed in 1999/2000 earned full accreditation status, 42.5% of those assessed in 2005 attained full status.

Strong international linkage with foreign universities: NUC continues to explore avenues to foster resource sharing and enhance joint teaching and research which will in turn bolster the standing of the university on most of the indicators in the global assessment.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CULTURE OF REFORM

It is important that on-going reforms are sustained if the goal is to revitalise university education in Nigeria. The following broad strategies for sustaining the culture of reform in the universities are proposed:

- Strategic planning is considered central to the sustenance of the culture of reform, hence all universities are encouraged to develop and implement their strategic plans.
- Ensuring that members of the university community are part of the initiation and implementation of the reform agenda of government.
- Incorporating the teaching of on-going reform processes, e.g., the NEEDS, the in the General Studies programme of Nigerian universities to enhance students' internalisation of the process and products and to recruit them as active stakeholders.
- Establishment of reform implementation committees or observatories in universities to monitor progress and propose strategies for overcoming obstacles in the implementation process.
- Adoption of shared national vision for a university of the future that evolves through an institutional and/or a national debate.
- Each university should build a mechanism for stakeholder collaboration in university governance, to ensure ownership of reforms by all parties concerned.
- Universities should apply self-cleansing mechanism to rid the system of reform-depressing elements and to prepare a fertile bed for reforms to grow.

- Re-orientation programme should be conducted for university staff and students whenever reforms are being developed and implemented to attune them to the spirit of the reform.
- Reduction in the turnover rate of managers of the university system to enhance continuity in reform implementation.
- Staff and students should be involved at the early stage of reforms and also kept informed and made part of the implementation framework.
- Institution of an internal quality assurance unit and the conduct of external audit to monitor reforms.
- Young lecturers should be mentored by older ones so that the former can imbibe the culture of on-going reforms.
- Building a culture of continuity in administration in the universities to ensure reform sustainability.
- Reforms and innovations should not be too drastic in their implementation. Phasing and gradual application will guarantee continuity.
- Reforms should be measurable for the purpose of monitoring.

Charter with Vice-Chancellors for 2006

The following charter of targets was made with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors for 2006 on the on-going reforms.

Improved internal efficiency: We are all committed to raising the internal efficiency of the system to a minimum of 90% in 2006. The ability of the university system to process its student input to good quality graduates is the key measure of its internal efficiency. Wastage through dropout, repetition and course carry-overs reduces internal efficiency. By way of example, if a university enrolls 100 students into a 4-year programme and the entire 100 students graduate in four years without repetition, course carry-overs or dropout, the internal efficiency of the programme is 100% (Input/Output X 100). However, if only 50 of the students graduate, the internal efficiency is 50%. The mean internal efficiency for the university can be computed by averaging the efficiency scores for all its component programmes. The same procedure can be applied to calculating the internal efficiency of the Nigerian university system by finding the mean of the mean scores

for all the universities.

In 2005, a rough estimate of 72% was returned as the level of internal efficiency of the system. The target for 2006 is minimum of 90%. This will be achieved through better quality teaching; adherence to carrying capacities hence small-sized classes; admission of well-motivated and bright students; stable academic calendar and speedy release of results.

Prompt release of students' results and transcripts: All Vice-Chancellors have made a commitment to a drastic reduction in the time it took in 2005 to release students' results and transcripts. In 2006, delay in the release of results and issuance of transcripts will be the exception rather than the rule. In 2005, staff who failed to meet deadlines set by Senate for submission of results received such sanctions as withholding of salary. Sanctions have ensured that results are released maximum two weeks after the completion of examinations. In most universities electronic capture of results to facilitate the issuance of transcripts is being implemented. Our target in 2006 is to release results at the departmental level maximum two weeks after the examination is concluded and to reduce wait-time for official issuance of transcripts to not more than two weeks.

Gradual elimination of overcrowded classes: We target a 20% reduction in the over-enrolled classes in programmes which feature overcrowding. This applies to programmes at the 200 level or higher that had student over-enrolment before the NUC carrying capacity enforcement. We are assured of 100% of carrying-capacity compliance for all 100-level programmes. By implication, problems which are attendant to over-enrolment such as examination malpractice, "sorting" and cultism are expected to observe a downward swing.

Stable academic calendar: The academic calendar was stable in 2005. Although no commitment has been secured from staff and student unions guaranteeing a strike-free year, we are hopeful that the dividends of a disruption-free 2005 will encourage all stakeholders to stretch the winning streak to 2006 and beyond.

Reduction in the manifestation of social vices: We are committed to at least 20% reduction over last year's figures in the manifestation of social vices on our university campuses. A combination of advocacy, improvement in the teaching-learning environment, speedy trial and sanctioning of culprits will ensure the lowering of the rates of cultism, sexual harassment, examination malpractice and "sorting".

Increased vigour in funds generation: Through endowments, consultancies, alumni contributions, donor/development partner support, and miscellaneous user-charges, vice-chancellors are hoping in 2006 to boost revenue by at least 5% more than the internally-generated revenue (IGR) figures for 2005. The minimum set by NUC is 10%. Last year, the average figure was 18%. The expectation, therefore, is that the average IGR for 2006 will be 23%.

ICT-enabled delivery of university education, management and administration: In 2006, the Nigerian university system will advance several paces forward in using information and communication technology to deliver quality university education. Online student registration, electronic class management, online payments, secure online student and staff ID registration and authentication system as well as the deployment of e-learning protocols, are expected to be more visible in the Nigerian university system in 2006.

A Niche for Covenant University

In all of these reform and revitalization plans, where does Covenant University (CU) fit in? I have taken time to study the progress of the university and come to the conclusion that CU without outside prompting has embarked on a track that will make it one of the models of the African University of the 21st century.

In February, I was part of the African Union Experts Group in Higher Education to develop a 10 Year Plan for the Revitalization of Universities in Africa. As we concluded our deliberations in Accra and I studied the growth of the Nigerian Covenant University, I observed a close link between what we planned for Africa for the next ten years and the grounds that Covenant University had covered in its first for years

of existence. I concluded that CU is several jumps ahead of most others and is poised to be among the success stories of quality university education not only in Nigeria but in the whole of the Africa region.

What are the characteristics of Covenant University that stands it out so distinctly? The list is numerous, so a few will be mentioned.

These include:

- having the most impressive infrastructural and physical facilities for its age in Nigeria. If the pace of growth of these facilities is sustained, CU has promise of being the most endowed university in physical facilities in Nigeria and perhaps in the West Africa sub-region
- a unique curriculum for producing an exemplary breed of disciplined, God-fearing, enterprising and diligent graduates.
- a rich stock of experienced academics that is well motivated through one of the best staff welfare schemes in Nigeria.
- a curriculum delivery system that is ICT-driven and learner friendly.
- an environment where such social vices as examination malpractice, cultism, "sorting" have no place.
- a research support culture by way well-stocked laboratories and libraries that is one of the best in Nigeria.
- a university with one of the highest proportion of foreign students in Nigeria.
- with potential to have one of the largest Endowments in West Africa in the next ten years.

Covenant University has made these laudable gains in the first four years of its existence, It should keep the momentum going in order to attain the No. 1 rank in Africa some time in the very rear futnre.

Concluding Remarks

In this address, we reviewed the development of university education in Africa and proposed ways by which the African university can respond to the forces of globalisation and the knowledge economy in the 21st century. We highlighted some of the ongoing reforms in the Nigerian

university system that are meant to respond to these forces. The place of Covenant University within the Africa and Nigeria scenarios was described.

The 7th Leon Sullivan summit ended last week with a note that African Universities should rise to the challenge of building a vibrant, strong and united continent. This conclusion was endorsed at the opening of the Nigeria in the Diaspora conference which opened in Abuja two days ago. The emerging message which is resonating across the continent is clear. Africa needs to regain the 21st century. The reinvigorated African university where innovation and change are hallmarks would be the driver for the attainment of this goal. Covenant University, no doubt will be a major player in the pursuit of this goal.