

THE IMPERATIVE OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR UNIZIK, AWKA: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Introduction

The proposal for the establishment of a Centre for Community and Rural Development (CCRD) by Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Awka has necessitated this position paper. In the midst of other centres in the University, CCRD seems to be all embracing centre that will definitely bring UNIZIK Institution into the challenges of its immediate environment and societal predicaments. The UNIZIK Management and Senate under the former Vice Chancellor, Prof Boniface C. E. Egboka, sought and brought into existence the highly needed Faculty of Agriculture with the acquisition of a sizeable land of about 120 Hectares at Ifite-Ogwari town.

With the emergence of this faculty, the institution has now fourteen faculties and many centres designed to enhance and accomplish the tripod/Trinitarian functions of the University, that is TEACHING, RESEARCH AND EXTENSION. It is within and through this faculty but in solidarity with other programmes that the new proposed Centre will flourish. Our concern is to demonstrate that the University functions of teaching and research should definitely be at the service of the third function of extension, which in all intent and purposes is considered to be the challenge or rather imperative of SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT.

Social Engagement as Main Function of Universities

The University remains the citadel of Teaching, Research and Extension, the environment for the formation of students in Character and Learning and the production of societal workforce. As a social institution, its other functions of Teaching and Research should be directed as earlier mentioned to accomplish the function of Extension or service to the community. The University should be able to respond to the practical problems of the society. The concept of Extension has drawn other concepts for the better explanation of the covenant which the University as a corporate entity has with the society. Such other concepts include *Outreach, Public Services, Social Responsibility or Social Engagement* of the University. The society makes a legitimate demand from the University on its capacity to solve the prevalent problems within the society. The society demands accountability of the investment put into the University.

The emergence of the Universities in the world demonstrated that Social Engagement remain the principal function of the University. For instance (Bonnen, 1998), in the medieval era of 11th and 12th Centuries when Universities were born, medieval Universities were committed to the societal needs of the era which was provision of civil and ecclesiastical leadership, lawyers and medical Doctors. This gave birth to the first three faculties in the University education, (i.e. Theology, Law and Medicine), and indeed the first three learned academic professions of Priesthood, Lawyers and Medical Doctors because of their fundamental graduate formation in the programme of Philosophy.

The next was the Renaissance Universities of 14th and 15th Centuries that continued the inherited tradition of the Medieval Universities but extended education to lay elite for societal leadership. The Modern Universities of 19th and 20th Centuries were established within the era of scientific revolution that expanded and included other faculties. But at its early beginning there was a lacuna because of limited access to education by the majority of the citizens and privileged advantage given to the wealthy elite and professionals. The number was highly inadequate for the teeming population. Its deficiency was seen not in the functions of teaching and research but in social engagement. This led to the emergence of the LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES IN AMERICA.

The Focus of Land-Grant University

The Land-Grant Universities or Colleges recorded four landmark stages of evolutionary growth (Gerber, 1997). The *First Stage* was the July 2, 1862 Morrill Act led by Senator Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont which made provisions of grants of public land (Land-Grants) to be sold to finance university in each state to “teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts... in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes”. This was considered a landmark legislation that responded to the societal needs of the time since it extended education beyond the wealthy classes/elites to farmers and industrial workers (mechanics). The Second Morrill Act came in August 30, 1890 that provided further endowment and support to Land-Grant initiative.

The *Second Stage* was the 1887 Hatch Act that supported the Land Grant institutions with the provision of federal funding that will help “to promote scientific investigations and experiments respecting the principles and applications of agricultural science”. The *Third Stage* was the 1914 Smith Lever Act that established National Cooperative Extension Service, “to aid in diffusing among the people of United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics and to encourage the application of the same”. The last was the Improving America’s School Act of 1994 which established equity in educational Land-Grant status to 29 tribal colleges.

Incidentally, James T. Bonnen (1998) maintained that the Land-Grant idea arose out of need of highly trained professionals especially in the new science based fields of the industrialized society (i.e. Engineering, Public Health, Agriculture, Nursing, Forestry, etc.). In essence, the original intent was not about agriculture but a defence of egalitarian nature of American democracy that abhors discrimination. The revolution was led not by farmers but by the middle class professionals who feared that industrial/scientific revolution was pushing the agrarian and urban workers into a disadvantaged position and were determined to secure a future where all classes are accommodated with an access to skills and practical educational growth necessary for a better futuristic life. However, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a large role in the administration of the federal land-grant funds and the coordination of agricultural land-grant activities at the national level. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities has this conclusion to make:

Today, America’s land-grant universities continue to fulfil their democratic mandate for openness, accessibility, and service to people, and many of these institutions have joined

the ranks of the nation's most distinguished public research universities. Through the land-grant university heritage, millions of students are able to study every academic discipline and explore fields of inquiry far beyond the scope envisioned in the original land-grant mission.

In effect, the Land-Grant University sustained the synergy between the tripod functions of the university, which is Teaching, Research and Extension, but exalted Extension/Service to the society as a fundamental imperative. This business of social engagement or responsibility of the University has exalted the University and given birth to such current expressions of *Outreach University*, *People's University* or simply *Communiversality*. This according to James T. Bonnen (1998) is "a corporate commitment of the University whose ultimate social value lies in societal problem solving. University outreach involves the creation of socially useful knowledge and services, plus conscious effort to extend this knowledge and service to problem areas in society" (p. 34).

Imperative of Social Engagement of Unizik

As in Okereke (2011), the Bill to the then Anambra State Legislatures for the establishment of a multi-campus State owned University of Technology in January 9, 1980 by Chief Jim Ifeanyichukwu Nwobodo, the State Governor, was passed by the State Assembly on July 14, 1980 and signed into law (no 7, 1980) on July 30, 1980 by the Governor. This saw to the birth of the then Anambra State University of Technology (ASUTECH) with campuses at Enugu, Awka, Abakaliki, Onitsha (Onitsha campus seemed not to have taken off at all). With the creation of new Anambra State on August 27, 1991 by the Head of State of the Federation, General Ibrahim B. Babangida, the then Military Administrator of the new Anambra State, Navy Captain Joseph Abulu, and the Awka campus of ASUTECH became a conventional Anambra State University with headquarters at Awka. The same was the story of Abakailiki campus that on creation of the State became Ebonyi State University, while the change of the old Anambra State to Enugu State gave birth to Enugu State University of Technology.

The New Anambra State University was to be renamed on November 21, 1991 with the Edict no. 5, 1991 of December 9, 1991 as Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU or UNIZIK) to honour our renowned and famous legendary statesman, Igbo icon, the first indigenous Governor General of Independent Nigeria and President of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Rt Hon Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Owelle of Onitsha. This State University was later to be taken over on the request of the State Government by the Federal Government through the Decree 34 of July 15, 1992 by General Ibrahim B. Babangida.

UNIZIK as autonomous and conventional University started with seven Faculties that are Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Management Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. Other six Faculties (i.e. Arts, Environmental Sciences, Health Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Agriculture) emerged later making the total to thirteen Faculties. With the split of Faculty of Natural Sciences into two (Physical and Bio-Sciences), the University has now fourteen Faculties and many Departments.

Frantz Fanon (1988) in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* maintained very truly that "Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission fulfil it or betray it" It is an

imperative for every institution to establish its philosophy and objectives (or as it were its mission and vision) and endeavour to rise to the responsibility to accomplish them. Within the immediate and wider society, the University must delineate or determine its strategies for social engagement for its continued relevance to the society. The recently published history of UNIZIK (Okereke, 2011) has this to say about the philosophy and objectives of the University:

ASUTECH was conceptualized as a community-based and a community-oriented University. The concept of a community-based and community-oriented University describes a situation in which the university derives its inspiration for teaching and research from the immediate and wider needs of the community in which it is situated and in return derives from that community, most of the wherewithal for its continued growth and sustenance.... The popularly-used accolade of the *'ivory tower'* mentality is modified by a situation where the academic takes *'the gown to the town'* (p. 3).

The enabling law of the University has this objective in view, that is “To encourage maximum exploitation of our local resources for the development of our technologies and technical skills designed to solve the nation’s social, economic and other related problems” (Okereke, 2011, p. 3). The above two quotations remain an imperative to social engagement by UNIZIK which is equally confirmed in the mission statement of the University in the *2008-2013 Strategic Plan* for Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Egboka, 2013):

The mission of the University is, thus, to use teaching, research, and public service to solve societal problems. In the process of learning, students would be oriented to use their education in the solution of practical problems confronting them and Nigerian society (p. 17).

If we may ask what are the problems challenging the wider and immediate society. For Bonnen (1998), “The advances in scientific knowledge and the external effects on society of the industrialization of agriculture have raised questions about food safety and nutrition, environmental and resources degradation, air and water pollution, agricultural sustainability, farm structure and rural community viability, all of which are in some degree additions to the research, teaching and extension agendas of the colleges” (p. 49), while for Rev Fr Prof Godfrey Nzamujo, the three threats to Africa is poverty, environmental degradation and demographic transition. The solution for him is through agriculture that will prevent rural exodus and urban decay and establish an integrated model of rural growth and community development. Finally, former Governor of Central Bank, Prof Chukwuma C. Soludo (2012) on Nigeria predicaments holds, “Nigeria continues to reap unprecedented oil boom but official statistics indicate that Nigerians continue to be poorer by the day (a rich country with impoverished people); moral values seem to be at the lowest ebb (despite an apparent boom in the religious industry); and Nigeria continues to rank badly on all global indices of good governance... Nigeria, the acclaimed ‘giant of Africa’ and after 51 years of political independence and earning more than US\$600 billion from oil still unable to provide any of the basic necessities of life of its citizens (food, clothing, shelter, water, electricity, security of life and property, etc.)” (p. 2).

These are the problems of our society that challenges the University education today. This is why attention is being shifted to solving the predicaments of hunger through Agriculture which

remain the mainstay of African economy (refer the 10years MOPUTO Declaration on the need for Countries like Nigeria to invest 10% of budget to Agriculture). It is regretted that after independence, Nigeria over depended on oil revenue for its foreign exchange and main source of revenue. This has submerged the nation to a curse as the Government sustains rentier, distributive and consumptive administration rather than the productive and developmental system of governance prevalent in the pre-independence and early post independence government. Our era is the dawn of cake sharing of oil revenue rather than the cake baking that characterised of the era of regional federalism which made agricultural production the main stay of the economy. And so Engr Prof A. P. Onwualu, the Director General of Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC) Federal Ministry of Science and Technology (2012), was right when he observed thus:

Agriculture remains the dominant sector in the rural areas of Nigeria where 70% of Nigerians reside. The diversity of favourable climatic conditions, the richness of soil types and abundant water resources, and high population density provide great potentials for crop, livestock, fishery and forestry production. Prior to independence and thereafter, agriculture was the main stay of the economy and a major source of revenue for funding development programmes of government. The country was one of the world's largest producers of palm oil and kernel, groundnut, cocoa, rubber, cotton, etc. It is on record that at independence, agriculture contributed up to 60% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria (p. iii).

Giving support to this laudable self evident truth on the validity of agriculture for sustainable Nigerian development is the former Governor of Central Bank, Prof Chukwuma C. Soludo (2012) that added:

Politics in the pre and post-independence Nigeria before the oil boom was essentially developmental. The regions were the building blocks of the nascent federalism. Each region was largely fiscally self-reliant based upon key agricultural products in the respective regions: palm produce in the East; cocoa in the west; and groundnut in the North. Imperfect as the federal structure was, each region paid its bills. Each region determined its own salary structure, and decided on the institutions that best served it. In the Eastern region, the University of Nigeria (with campuses in Enugu and Calibre) was built; farm settlements and palm plantations were built; public water schemes and roads were constructed; schools and the cities of Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Aba, Calabar, Enugu, etc were built. In the West, the University of Ife was built; citizens were empowered through access to education; cities were built and basic infrastructure provided. In the North, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was built; schools and basic infrastructure constructed, and cities built. The point here is that the governments and politicians understood that they had to invest in the productive capacities of their regions and people as a foundation for future growth and prosperity. Industries were built. Because governments relied mostly on income taxes, accountability was relatively high. Production-oriented politics dominated (p. 15).

We cannot fail to give credit to Nigerian laudable policies in agricultural sector (as articulated by Engr Prof A. P. Onwualu, 2012), seen in the First Plan (1962-1968), Second Plan

(1970-1974) and Third Plan (1975-1980) and the present Agricultural Transformation Action Plan (ATAP), which have resulted in the existence of “agricultural institutions and programmes including 17 agricultural research institutions, several River Basin Development Authorities, Agricultural Development Programmes in every state, 39 educational Institutions (3 Universities of Agriculture, 17 Federal Colleges of Agriculture, 19 State Colleges of Agriculture), Special programme on Food Security, etc.” (pp. Iv-v). Unfortunately most of these plans/policies have suffered setbacks through poor management/implementation, lack of basic infrastructure, appropriate technology, accessing credit facilities, weak linkages between agriculture and Industry and poor market access, the need for value chain approach, etc.

The Nigerian Agricultural Resources are classified into Crop Resources: Fibre (cotton) fruits/vegetables (ginger, tomato, pepper, mango), grain (maize, sorghum, rice), legumes (soya bean, groundnut), tubers (yam, cassava), energy crops (jatropha, typha grass), tree crops (orange, cashew) and oil seed (oil palm, melon); Animal Resources: Fishery, livestock (cattle, sheep, pigs), poultry (chicken, turkey); and Forest Resources: plantation (timber, bamboo), ornamental (flowers), wild trees, tea, coffee and cola. If these resources are well developed they can generate revenue more than the oil sector, provide employment and attend to the socio-economic challenges of our nation. It is within this framework that the concept of a centre that has agriculture as its central focus within the University is truly a desideratum for the achievement of its social engagement function.

Centre for Community and Rural Development (CCRD) and Songhai Integrated System of Development in Unizik

The response through the initiative of Vice-Chancellor to establish Faculty of Agriculture and for the University of Administration to see to the existence of many outreach programmes like Chike Okoli Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies, Continuing Education Programme, Pre-Science Programme, Sandwich Programme, Chisco Institute For Transport Studies, Confucius Institute etc., and many centres like Sustainable Development, Biotechnological Research, Ekwueme Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Research, Energy and Environment, Excellence in the Arts & Humanities, Water Resources Research remain ancilla to the fulfilment of its social engagement functions.

As earlier indicated both the faculty of Agriculture and the new Centre for Community and Rural Development (CCRD) remain landmark initiatives to respond to the need of the present society besieged with the problems of poverty, food security and healthy living. The predicament of unemployable youths will challenge the university to revisit its curricular for the needed response to societal needs of today. This Centre which will have multidisciplinary orientation should as contained in the draft blueprint (2013) be “a centre of excellence that serves as an engine to drive transformation and translation of teaching, research and community services, enabling Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) as a developmental/functional university to become a major resource development and empowerment of the citizens of Anambra State and its environs” (p. 1).

It is at this juncture that we believe that Songhai Integrated System of Development remain the answer to the challenges of the day and will indeed serve as weapon of mass construction in Agricultural based and led industry for community and rural development. Songhai farms

operate a tripod of *Livestock, Fishery and Crop* and beyond to include Teaching/Research, etc. The specifications are as follows from submissions of Dr C. I. Ebenebe(2010 & 2013):

- **Livestock/Animal Science:** Farm structures for poultry (including geese, quail, guinea fowl, duck even ostrich and peafowl), Piggery, Grass cutter, Snail, Cattle ranch, Small ruminants (Sheep and Goat), Rabbitry, Maggotry, Vermiculture centres (For rearing earthworms used as an animal protein resource in poultry feeds as a means of minimizing high cost involved in the use of Fishmeal), Hatchery, Feed mill, Abattoir, etc.
- **Fishery:** Earthen ponds, Concrete pond, Hatchery, Ponds for raising Fish feed: Daphnia and Zooplankton, etc.
- **Crop:** Farm machinery and equipment sheds, Nursery sheds, Green house, Farm machinery fabrication centre, etc., and Farm produce Sales Department.
- **Teaching facility:** That is multidisciplinary formation.

Songhai Integrated Farm is truly and really integrated and centred on zero waste and bio gas energy that enhances greater productivity at reduced cost. Its success depends on essential values of knowledge, skills, value system, and culture of discipline, competent hands, and solidarity to the vision/mission, integrity and strong work ethics. Songhai Integrated Farm operates organic farming system (i.e. Organic or conservative agriculture) that does not involve use of chemical additives, pesticides, herbicides and even drug for livestock, besides it involves a lot of new technologies such as:

- **Production of Biogas** (from Poultry litter and human excreta)
- **Electricity Generation** (From Poultry litter and human excreta)
- **Production of Mushroom** (From bunch of inflorescence found on palm trees)
- **Local fabrication of farm equipment and farm-produce processing machines**
- **Use of EM technology and plastic mulching** for improving soil fertility and weed control. EM Technology is Effective Micro organism Technology, developed by Prof. Teruo Higa in Japan in 1970s and introduced to the outside world in 1986. It involves the use of three microorganisms: a photosynthetic bacteria, lactic acid bacteria and yeast. The mixture of these organisms is capable of speeding up rotting of organic matter to release nutrients, enhancing survival of beneficial soil organism, while eliminating the harmful ones, thus eliminating disease causing organisms. EM technology is presently used in 105 nations in the world, In Africa only Egypt and South Africa have been using it extensively; Prof. Nzamujo has introduced this technology in most parts of West Africa especially Benin Republic and Nigeria.
- **Raising of Daphnia larvae and maggots** to feed carnivorous fishes
- **Raising of zooplankton** to feed herbivorous fishes
- **Processing of farm products into more durable products:** Avocado pear for creams, Orange, Pine apple and mangoes for juice, canning of pureed tomatoes, production of jam from fruits, processing of honey, soya cholesterol free vegetable oil from soya bean
- **Production and use of biopesticides and bioherbicides** from Mexican marigold, garlic, neem trees, lantana camara, pyrethrum and animal manure
- **Production and use of herbal preparations in treating livestock diseases**
- **Integration of farm** in such a way that waste from one point is recycled and used in another section
- **Use of water hyacinth for odour control** and methane gas production

The list seems to be endless, but all these are the technologies that make Songhai Integrated Farm unique and a profit making venture since the cost of production is largely minimized by use of local, cheap and natural inputs. However, these technologies are novel even to Professors of agricultural science who did their trainings when such technologies have not been developed. This therefore necessitates training of our own staff (at least one lecturer and one lab technologists in each of the seven departments and two agricultural engineers from the Department of Agricultural Engineering) to equip us properly to run the organic farms when established.

Conclusion: Action Sheet

- i. There is **need for a decision** to establish and replicate Songhai Integrated Farm for UNIZIK at the land at Ifite-Ogwari. This requires a budget by the University for the accomplishment of this noble project. It is important that the establishment and take off of the farm be planned within a specified time schedule This involves also a decision for the provision of space for the CCRD and designation of director/personnel for the Centre.
- ii. **Need to establish Collaboration/Partnership with Professor Godfrey Nzamujo** the chairman and founder of Songhai Integrated Farm at Port Novo in the Republic of Benin. He is a repository of knowledge on how to develop and operate such environmentally friendly, organic farming system. He has collaborated with many leaders of African countries and state governors in Nigeria in establishing Songhai farm model in their respective countries/states. To establish Songhai Farm at Ifite Ogwari, the University Management will need to get in touch with Professor G. Nzamujo to discuss the terms/MOU of such collaboration. At present Prof. G. Nzamujo has a Songhai Farm Coordinator in Nigeria in the person of Gregory Iyke Ibe of Uтуру Songhai Partnership Ltd.
- iii. **Need for formal Invitation of Prof. Godfrey Nzamujo to visit the UNIZIK land at Ifite Ogwari.** This requires the designing of farms for crops, livestock and fishery for UNIZIK at Ifite Ogwari in such a way as to replicate Songhai farm at Port Novo requires proper harnessing of natural features in that environment. Prof. Nzamujo needs to visit Ifite Ogwari, so as to precisely delineate the position of each crop type, livestock species and fishery sections in the farm.
- iv. **Need for the Production of Farm Map and Architect Model for the Songhai Farm at Ifite Ogwari in consultation with Prof. G. Nzamujo.** The Physical Planning Unit will then use the Professor's directives and inputs from each of the seven departments in the Faculty of Agriculture to develop the Farm Map and Architectural Model for the work to be done. The model will serve as a roadmap for initial and future development of the far.
- v. **Need to plan officially sponsored visit to Port Novo in the Republic of Benin.** Participants will be drawn from the Management, Academic Planning, Physical Planning, Public Relations/Information, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Engineering and Bio-resources, etc.
- vi. **Build up data base** for all the communities in Anambra with codes for the outreach programme (see attached crops/geological information in the blueprint from Faculty of Agriculture). See also the National Briefs of 1987-1989 and 1990-1992 for better coordination.

- vii. **Need to draw up multidisciplinary oriented programmes for the Centre**, which is for degree, diploma and certificate programmes (a draft already done by the Faculty through Dr J.C. Okonkwo).
- viii. **Need to open contacts with national and international funding agencies** for agric-based initiatives, research and programmes. For instance, Federal Government Agencies, Central Bank of Nigeria, the Bank of Agriculture, Micro-finance Banks, and even individuals interested in investing in agriculture, etc.
- ix. **Need to establish linkages** with the existing local, national and International celebrated Farms for better productivity.

Finally, may this position paper continue to motivate us to accomplish giant strides for the corporate image of our great UNIZIK.

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