



6th November 2012

To: Professor Nimi Briggs
The Chairman of the management board
University of Benin Teaching Hospital
Nigeria

From: Richard U. Oriji
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A REPORT ON “THE 1ST ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2012” ORGANISED BY THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY NIGERIA SOCIETY (CUNS). HELD ON THE 6TH OF OCTOBER 2012 AT THE CLARE COLLEGE GILLESPIE CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, UNITED KINGDOM (UK).

ATTENDANCE

Auditorium Capacity: 150
Invited Speakers: 8 out of 11
Students: 102 out of 139



REPORT

The event started at 12pm with the Nigerian national anthem. This was followed by the Clare college president Paul Cartilage, the AG Leventis professor of Greek culture University of Cambridge. Who welcomed representatives and dignitaries from Nigeria and students (Nigerians and others) from all over the UK. He gave a talk on the history of the University of Cambridge and Clare College.

The current president of CUNS Richard Oriji, a University of Cambridge PhD researcher in Aerospace/turbo-machinery Engineering, followed with a talk on the essence of the event, which he emphasised was to create an avenue for intellectuals to brain storm with key policy makers as well as interested academicians on the way forward in our educational sector. This he noted was to encourage students after completion of their studies to return home and contribute to a positive change in the nation, as he has over the years developed the flare for quality education. A brief synopsis of the society was given, noting that the society was an avenue for Nigerian students studying in the UK and other interested individuals in the nation (Nigeria) as a whole to come together and discuss on holistic approaches towards a better Nigeria. He further spoke on some of the challenges faced by the society and in planning this path breaking event. In conclusion he extended the apologies on behalf of the Minister of Education: Hon. Prof. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, The Governor of Rivers State: Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi who where unavoidably absent to give a key note lecture and prayed for the release of the abducted Delta State Commissioner for Higher Education: Prof. Hope Eghagha who was also an invited speaker.

Dr. Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, the Nigerian High commissioner to the UK, was represented by Mr. Enya Francis, who gave a heart warming speech. He noted that the high commissioner was particularly pleased with the initiative of the organizers to put together the annual lecture series. He went on to extend his hope that the program will be sustained and also grow towards making a greater impact in future. He mentioned as representatives of the government, they request that students lend their support by devoting their best to their academics as education is the bedrock of every nation. He further went on to urge students to acquire as much knowledge and skills while they are here for their studies. Also hoping that they would return home to contribute their own quota towards the development of the Nigeria, and in the educational sector where the need may arise. He went on to appeal that all Nigerian students abstain from any activities that would tarnish the image of our great nation. He used the opportunity to thank the University of Cambridge for its sustained effort in impacting relevant skills and knowledge to Nigerian students, as it is indirectly contributing to the development of the Country. He concluded by wishing the organisers of the first annual lecture series, the best in their endeavours while assuring them that the Nigerian high commission would collaborate with them to support their noble initiative.

Nimi Briggs a renowned professor of obstetrics and gynaecology and present chairman of the management board – University of Benin teaching hospital, commenced the lecture series giving a talk on “Nigeria, the country, the people, the economy, the resources and the educational sector”. This was to reacquaint the audience on the peculiar characteristics of the Nigeria, especially non Nigerians who are not familiar with the country. He started by

encouraging students not to be discouraged by the long list of absentees and that the development of Nigeria was in their hands. He stated that with the strength and ability of education in people like them, the nation would be able to surmount all the difficulties it is currently facing. He went further to emphasize that the event should be sustained and developed to a point where it is capable of making policy recommendation to the government, on not just educational matters. He spoke about the demographics and geography of Nigeria. On the subject of the people, he identified the majority groups and the minority groups. He particularly noted that the issue of minority groups in Nigeria surfaced approximately in the late 50's, when it was evident that the country was about to be independent from her colonial masters. Hence the minority group needed to make their presence known in order not to be marginalised. This he said lead to the inauguration of the minority commission in 1958. Furthermore, he noted that the nation had grown from twenty five million before independence to about one hundred and sixty million after independence. The largeness of the population he said was bound to bring problems to the nation. The solution to this problem he highlighted was not separation as believed and agitated by many, but rather an avenue to learn ways of solving the problems, as there are similar largely populated countries such as India and China who have been able to rise above these challenges. The economy he said is growing at the rate of over 6% but this however is not evident in the wellbeing of the people. He concluded by commending the organizers of this ground breaking initiative lead by the president of CUNS and thanked the Nigerian high commission for their commitment and support towards education.

John Martin the Cambridge Education Regional Manager for Europe and Africa, gave a talk on the contribution of his organisation to the Nigerian educational sector. He mentioned the project called Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN). This project is geared to towards improving the quality of learning, management and funding of basic education in Nigeria. The project he mentioned was a partnership between the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the federal government of Nigeria to give children a better quality of basic education. The first phase which is a six year plan 2008 - 2014 comprised six states; Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Jigawa, Kwara and Enugu. This project he described involved designing a strategic plan for the educational sector in each state. This would be achieved by getting members of the community involved in the educational sector. This project he describes so far has been successful.

Olugbenga the CEO of The International Education Consultancy (TIEC) who delivered the third lecture commenced by challenging students present not to look at themselves as just change agents but leaders of today and tomorrow and not to wait until they are 50 or 60 years of age before they start making an impact. He noted that many of the people who have made significant impact in the country, started their journey in their late twenties. Regarding the challenges being faced in the nation, he suggested that rather than try to address the problems, we should address the root cause as he believed that it is the way forward to gaining a lasting solution. He said some of the problems we faced before the country's amalgamation are still the same problems we are facing today. He emphasised that if the foundation of these issues are not dealt with then we cannot move forward as a nation. Another issue he raised is the fact that our educational sector tends to look outside for the solution rather than find one within its people. We rely on external aids as a means of change, which we must refrain from in order to move forward in development. Speaking on the lessons, challenges and opportunities in the Nigerian educational sector from his experience, he highlighted the following challenges which he believes, once addressed could help deal with the issue;

- Inadequate motivation in the teaching profession
- Lack of pride in the teaching profession
- The emergence of the establishment of private universities/institutions which obviously draws the academic staff in the public institutions
- leadership

Some of the opportunities he identified include;

- The opportunity to go back and contribute in teaching/lecturing
- Provide consultation to the educational sector
- Establish new schools.

He concluded by advising the students present to start networking and discussing intellectually about these issues using such forums such as what the president of CUNS has provided, taking advantage of the opportunities available to improve the educational sector in Nigeria to a world standard. It is his belief that if Nigeria fails then the entire black race has failed because Nigeria is believed to be the giant of Africa. Therefore we should rise up to be the giants indeed and not just in words.

The second session which commenced an hour after a bountiful lunch break was kick started by Dr. Chrid Imafidon, the father of the Nigerian child genius who passed her GCSE at the age of 13. He gave a brief motivational talk challenging student's present identifying that every student had the potential to be a genius, they only need to

rise up to the challenge. After his strong motivational talk a symposium followed designed to address the key lecture topics to be delivered by the absent speakers as follows:

- Leadership and followership challenges in Nigeria – Is education a solution?
- Does academic mobility contribute to the economic, social and educational development of Nigeria
- Is education worth fighting for?
- The contribution of education to national development

The chief discussant of the symposium was Prof. Briggs who set the pace for each of the topics by giving a brief introduction as to what each topic set to achieve. The panel of discussants also included

Mr. Enya Francis

Dr. Tunji Gbadamosi

Dr. John Martin

Dr. Chris Imafidon

Mr. Olugbenga Ogunbode

This session proved to be highly interactive and stimulating as both the discussants and students contributed intellectually to each topic raised.

The symposium discussions are summarised below:

1. Leadership and followership challenges in Nigeria – is education a solution?

Prof Briggs gave an introduction to this topic by describing a leader as someone who can think on behalf of the people and someone who can use the funds available to the nation judiciously. While a follower is one who is able to honestly elect a leader, adjudge them based on their capability and be able to challenge their leaders when they are acting below expectation. The issue to be discussed he stressed was that whether education could solve the challenges faced in the Nigerian polity. Various contributions were made by students and the discussant, and based on all the contributions he summarised as follows:

- Education is indeed central to the solution to the leadership and followership challenges of Nigeria. This is because it creates the awareness and equips the people to intelligently choose their leaders and challenge them when the need arises.
- Education should not just be seen as certification but rather, an awareness of what is right and what is wrong.
- Once education is assimilated and internalised, it should bring about cognitive changes in the people. This would make them abhor corruption, and also make them always see the need to do what is right.
- Leaders should try to lead by example
- There is need for our sociological orientation as a nation to be adjusted.
- Education is important for leaders to acquire, but it is the changes that should be eternal.
- We should strive to establish institutions rather than leaders.

2. Does academic mobility contribute to the economic, social and educational development of Nigeria?

As an introduction to this topic, the chief discussant noted that education provides a platform for people to interact and learn new ideas. How this contributes to the development of the nation was the subject to be discussed.

Based on the contributions from discussants and students, he summarised as follows:

- The content of our education should be revisited
- Leaders as well as students should not only travel to other developed countries, to observe how things work, but also come back home to implement these changes.
- We should go back to our country to contribute to positive changes as no one would do this for us and
- We should also look into the aspect of applying the education acquired.

3. Is education worth fighting for?

By way of introduction, the chief discussant noted that education exposes us to civilization. Then he questioned, is the value of education substantial that we should do our best to acquire it as individuals and as a nation? Should parents do all they can to make sure their children are educated? How valuable is education to necessitate a student applying him or herself to a life time of scholarship and diligent study. The changes education brings to us as individuals and a nation, are these positive enough that we should strive to obtain it?

Based on the contribution from discussants and students he summarised:

- Education would help us know our rights and fight for them
- The teaching profession should be made attractive
- Education would reduce vulnerability
- Social mobilization would help fight for this cause and
- We should desist from things that devalue education such as malpractices

4. Contribution of education to national development

Lastly, on the list of symposium topics, Prof. Briggs started by stressing that education should give us the necessary skills required for us to become thinkers by which we can develop our country.

Based on the contributions from the discussants and students, he summarised as follows:

- We should not lay emphasis on some aspect of education at the expense of others
- We should look into technical education
- We should look at the application of knowledge acquired and provide facilities for practicals in our secondary and tertiary education
- Teachers should be motivated

AWARDS

The event came to a conclusion with the presentation of awards by the CUNS president Mr. Richard Oriji. This award was for their notable contribution to education in Nigeria and also in recognition as patrons of CUNS. The lists of awardees are as follows:

- Prof. Nimi Briggs (Chairman of the management Board, University of Benin Teaching hospital)
- Prof. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai (Minister of Education) - *Absent*
- Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi (Governor of Rivers State) - *Absent*
- Prof. Hope Eghagha (Commissioner for Higher Education, Delta State) – *Absent*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In closing the society acknowledged the contributions of the following individuals/institutions below towards the success of the annual lecture series, and thanked all the students and invited guests.

- The University of Cambridge
- Planning committee members CUNS
- Prof. Paul cartilage
- Mr. Terry Ndee (Associate Director, University of Cambridge development office)
- Mrs. Eva Rybicki (Centre of African Study, University of Cambridge}
- Mrs. Sophie Kings (Fellowship administrator, Clare College)

SPONSORS

- Clare College, University of Cambridge
- Richard Oriji – President CUNS
- Eric Akpata – member CUNS
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