
Transforming Nigeria's Universities from Local to Global Centres of Learning¹

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Abstract

The collapse of universities following the adoption of SAP in the 1980s opened a window of opportunity for developing country universities like those in 'Nigeria to foster collaboration with those in the developed high income countries in order to improve the quality of their institutions. It has also helped them to show appreciation for the possible contributions of their citizens in the Diaspora. This paper is about the attitude of home-based scholars to the possible role of Nigeria's scholars in the Diaspora to the development of the university system in particular and the country as a whole. A study was conducted in five universities on attitude of top echelons- and beneficiaries of linkage programmes to Nigerian Diaspora scholars in the US and Canada. It is undeniable from the study that all recognize the benefits of linkage programmes and are prepared to welcome Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora. The paper concludes by highlighting variants of collaborative relationships, the challenges underlying them and how Nigeria's universities can be transformed from local to global centres of learning.

Introduction

There was a perceptible shift in state policies in low income countries in sub-Sahara Africa some thirty years ago when responsible national authorities adopted the structural adjustment programme (SAP) (Easterly, 2000) which is anchored on a market-driven economic strategy, a derivative of the neoliberal ideology. At the same time, these countries also came under the influence of the recommendation of the World Bank which downplayed the importance of tertiary education for developing African countries (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002; World Bank/UNESCO, 2000).

The combined effect of these actions spelt doom for the higher education sub-sector in low income countries in sub-Sahara Africa. Funding of institutions of higher learning declined precipitously due to the devaluation of national currencies. The salaries of staff plummeted while funds for the procurement of equipment and refurbishment of facilities dried up. The result was that the libraries and physical facilities of the various institutions of higher learning became decrepit while their laboratories have been used for "theory of practical" because of obsolete equipment for experiments.

The state policies or actions that are described above led to the flight of highly skilled teachers from tertiary institutions in Africa to high income and more developed countries around the world which had auspicious working environment, good salaries, and excellent facilities for research (Lewis, 2009). Universities like the one at Ibadan (Nigeria) which were believed to

be at par with any of those in the high income countries before the crisis in higher education became a shadow of themselves due to SAP (Ade-Ajayi, 2001). They harboured staff with low morale and job satisfaction. Ade-Ajayi summed up the situation in the following words:

credibility, and professionalism. No wonder a World Bank funded research by NISER has reported that Nigerian graduates are below standard in the acquisition of language, analytical and technical skills. In short, at the moment, the universities are a colossal waste of money since they consume so much and profit so little. Remember the old saying of Alexander Pope: "A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep or taste not of the 'Pier 'ean Spring'. A university that no longer pursues excellence has become a dangerous, thing",

An awareness of the unintended (or may be intended) impact of the afore-mentioned policies/ recommendations prompted a mix bag of responses from stakeholders. For example, even though the authorities in low income countries in sub-Sahara Africa were quick to reject the World Bank recommendation which played down the importance of tertiary or university education for development, nevertheless they (i.e., the authorities) somehow imbibed the philosophy of the bank which enjoined these countries to see higher education as *a private* rather than *a public* good (Sawyerr, 2004a; 2004b). Low income countries in sub-Sahara Africa doled out licenses to the private sector providers to establish tertiary educational institutions (viz., university, polytechnics and colleges of education) in order to absorb the numerous applicants who were unable to find placement in the few available publicly owned and funded institutions. This singular action completely changed the landscape of higher education in the continent. The number of private universities grew phenomenally and within the space of a few years. There are now as many as, or more private universities than publicly funded owned ones in many countries in Africa. These private institutions currently co-exist with the poorly funded public universities.

But as has been reported, the move to see tertiary education as *private* rather than as a *public good* came with a price that revolved around quality. As Mamdani (2007) bemoaned in the case study of Makerere University which was prototypic of the situation in most of the institutions in low income countries in Africa in the 1980s and 90s, universities were transformed into "money making factories." They paid little, or no attention to the quality of their products and knowledge production which is one of the principal goals of universities (Mamdani, 2008). Similarly, the private universities that complemented publicly funded ones or which were promoted to serve as the alternative to the former have not necessarily raised the bar of quality (Erinosho, 2008). Indeed, the private universities have turned out in some respect to be avenues for making money off students by their proprietors.

On the flip side is the step taken by responsible national authorities in the wake of the crisis in higher education in low income countries in sub-Sahara Africa in the 1980s and 90s and also the response of international partners and donors. These partners/donors articulated and funded various initiatives aimed at strengthening universities in Africa. The principal goal of their Initiatives was to stem the rut and contribute into making Africa's universities globally competitive. In this regard, four US foundations, namely, Carnegie, Corporation of New York, Ford, Rockefeller and John D and Catherine Mac Arthur Foundations jointly earmarked about a three and fifty million US dollars to support higher education in Sub-Sahara Africa, notably, universities, in the wake of the crisis in higher education in 1980s and 90s. They also

expanded the portfolio of their support to cover longer term capacity enhancement programmes after the initial grant. Finally, the bilateral and multilateral organizations also spent over US\$38 million to strengthen higher education sub-Saharan Africa between 1995 and 2007 (Lewis, 2009).

Of significance in the context of this paper is the response to the crisis in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa through collaborative and/or partnership relationships. Partnerships for strengthening institutions are not entirely new in sub-Saharan Africa because efforts to assist African institutions predated the crisis in the higher education sub-sector that took place in the 1980s and 90s. Indeed, various institutions of higher learning in the several newly independent African countries benefited from specially funded programmes of not-for-profit foundations and the Governments of Euro-American countries immediately after independence. Assistance to many of these countries was in the form of special scholarship schemes to train high level manpower for the new nations; provision of grants to support research work; and funding of staff and student exchange programmes. Some foundations or government agencies like International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC) also offered special grants to returning scholars in order to ease their re-entry and integration into their home countries.

The development of the capacity of scholars and institutions in order to compete in a knowledge-based and driven globalizing world is now the priority of many low income countries. And one strategy for achieving this goal has been through various strands of partnership/collaborative relationships. Partnerships are being forged between the northern institutions/scholars (i.e., Euro-America countries/institutions) and their southern counterparts (i.e., the countries in sub-Saharan Africa) and/or between south and south (i.e., the more developed among low income and the less). National authorities and institutions in African countries now willingly support and/or enter into all manner of partnerships with bilateral, multilateral, not-for-profit foundations, and agencies in order to strengthen their institutions.

The literature is replete with reports on various strands of collaborative linkage/partnership relationship between scholars and institutions in low and high income countries (Ahlberg et al., 1997; Chandiwana et al, 2003). The strands of linkage/partnership include: technical assistance; collaborative research; staff and student exchange programmes; overseas training; institution building and training; special scholarships; cultural exchange programmes; bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Whatever is the case, linkage or partnerships are designed to: build the capacity of host institutions in low income countries; develop/enhance the research capability of scholars and/or institutions (Shrum & Campion, 2000); promote cultural understanding; conduct research on mutually agreed problems; facilitate the understanding among peoples/cultures; promote peaceful relationship (Duque et al., 2005; Foote et al., 2008; Hansel & Grove, 1986).

The benefits of the various strands collaboration/partnerships are incalculable according various reports. For instance, international student exchange programmes help students to have a better appreciation of their society as well as of the hosting societies; and a greater awareness of other cultures (Altbach & Teichier, 2001; Altbach & Knight 2007). They also help students to develop their skill (Hansel & Grove, 1986; Messer & Wolter, 2007; Sowa,

2002). Furthermore, collaborative research provides opportunity for low income countries to develop research skill, make extra money and also publish scholarly papers (Chataway, Smith, & Wield, 2005; Ahlberg, Nordberg, & Tomson, 1997). Technical assistance on the other hand has been a veritable strategy for strengthening and/or developing new academic programmes; strengthening institutions; and also training staff (Wickert, 1960; Costello et al, 2000; Whitworth et al, 2008; Cogburn et al., 2003).

Linkage/partnerships are however not devoid of their downside. Sometimes they are seen as anew form of colonialism especially when low income countries perceive their northern more developed partners as overbearing or paternalistic or when the low income partners feel that they are not being adequately remunerated or receiving as much as their northern counterparts or when they turn awry due to lack of a clear roadmap.

There are also instances in which the low income country partners are not producing as many scholarly reports as their northern colleagues in research collaboration (Ahlberg, 1997). Other challenges include poor communication between partners or discrimination in the allocation of resources among them or the fear of domination by a more powerful partner, and/or lack of candour among team members (Gaillard, 1994; Shrum et al., 2000).

By and large, collaborations have proved to be a cost-effective way of transferring skill to scholars in need and/or for institution building in low income countries. They have also helped to fill gap created by the dearth of skilled manpower as a result of brain drain. Finally, collaborations have become the source of additional resources to complement funds from domestic sources for the development of the higher education sub-sector in low income countries in Africa.

Recent reports by Zeleza (2004) have brought into focus the possible role of African scholars in the Diaspora in partnership Initiatives. One thing that is self-evident is that African scholars in the Diaspora in high income countries constitute a formidable subgroup. For example, the US Bureau of Census estimated that the migrants born in Africa possessed the highest level of educational attainment in comparison to others from Asia, Europe and Latin America (Nesbitt, 2002). They are therefore often better skilled than the immigrants in other subgroups while many have also attained high positions in various institutions of higher learning in high income countries.

The push to strengthen the institutions of higher learning in low income countries in Nigeria/ sub-Saharan Africa has created a window of opportunity to harness the pool of African scholars in the Diaspora. Some of them are willing to contribute as a way of giving something back to their home countries in spite of muted response and/or near hostility of their home country scholars towards their offer (Nesbitt, 2002). They can be mobilized to play an active role in institution building through partnership, thereby redressing the brain drain which began in the 1980s and 90s. This has been the theme of the research work of Zeleza who found that quite a number of such scholars who left in the wake of the crisis of the 1980s 90s in higher education sub-sector who are willing to return home express trepidation about whether they will be well-received.

Overview of Evolution of Nigeria's University Education

Education is in the concurrent list in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Consequently, both the federal and state can establish and run educational institutions at all levels.

The first university in the country, the University of Ibadan, was established in 1948, followed by Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo (He Ife), Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria), and Nigeria (located in Nsukka) universities in the early 1960s.

A spate of new ones followed when the federal government established universities in the capitals of the newly created states in the 1970s, - e.g., Ilorin, Maiduguri, Jos, Calabar, Kano etc. The state governments also took interest in university education following the return to civil democratic rule in 1979 when they established universities.

Southwest states spearheaded the establishment of state-owned universities, followed by the south east. The northern states recently began to establish their own universities.

The pressure to open up was great because existing universities could not accommodate the number of applicants seeking admission. Over a million applicants seek admission into Nigeria's universities every year while less than 35 per of them are offered places. Largely as a result of the pressure for more opportunities for university applicants and probably due to the determination of the authorities to reduce the power of Nigeria's university academic staff union that held the government to ransom through incessant strike actions, the Obasanjo's Administration encouraged the participation of the private sector in the provision of higher education. His Administration opened up and facilitated the approval of license for private universities and polytechnics. Several missions (Christian and Muslim) as well as entrepreneurs have seized the opportunity to do so.

There are currently 48 federal Universities; 37 state universities; and 45 private universities that are accredited by the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. Between 2008 and 2010, it is estimated that 37.6% of the enrollees are women as compared to 62.4% men. (US Embassy, 2012). NUC has pegged enrolment at 147,000 (Naira land Forum, 2012). According to a recent report issued by the United States Embassy in Nigeria, Nigeria is the source of the largest number of students from Sub-Saharan in US schools. There are 6,568 Nigerian students studying in 733 accredited US colleges and universities (US Embassy, 2012).

Several universities in Nigeria may be described as conventional. In other words, they run a wide range of programmes, - humanities, science, engineering, medicine, environmental sciences etc. Those that are ostensibly established as specialized ones (e.g. university of agriculture and university of technology), have also expanded their mandate and are now running degree programmes in business, humanities, and social sciences.

The rapid growth of universities has outstripped the human resources that are required to run them effectively. Faculty is often bottom heavy because several teachers are graduate assistants and/or assistant lecturers who are yet to obtain the doctorate degree in their

discipline. Currently, NUC estimates that barely 30% of faculty in most of Nigeria's universities holds the PhD in their discipline².

The NUC established an accreditation regime in order to safeguard quality. Quality and standard are determined on the basis of a number of criteria like the quality of facilities and qualification of teaching staff, staff mix, governance etc. NUC conducts accreditation exercise every two years into universities and issues reports on whether academic programmes deserve to be accredited. Those that do not satisfy the criteria are barred from admitting students. NUC has also directed that the minimum qualification for any faculty member is a doctorate degree and all universities have been directed to comply by the stipulated deadline. This has put enormous pressure on institutions and faculty members who lack doctorate degree in their discipline.

Courting Nigeria's Experts in the Diaspora

Several factors have contributed to the flight of Nigerian experts to overseas countries. Brain drain has therefore turned out to be brain gain for other countries. The developed high income countries in Euro-America have been the major beneficiaries of brain drain from Nigeria (Adebayo, 2010). As example, a report by two writers on Nigerian scholars in the United States observed as follows:

As of 2004, up to 3.24 million Nigerians were in the United States alone.. Some 174,000 were information technology professionals, 202,000 were medical and allied professionals, about 50,000 were engineers, and another 250,000 were professionals in other areas, including university lecturers - only about 20% of sub-Sahara Africans educated abroad return home, the remaining 80% stayed on in the country of study (Munzali & Obaje, 2008).

The Nigerian authorities have long recognized the potential contributions of its citizens in the Diaspora to the development of the educational system in particular and country as a whole. Following the return to civil democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria's federal legislature established a committee for Diaspora issues. Efforts were made, and are also still being made through the House to reach out to Nigerians in the Diaspora to contribute to the development of the country. Meetings are often held with highly skilled Nigerians in various cities around the world from time to time to garner support for this Initiative with commendable result. Every-one is encouraged to come back home and make contribution to national development.

Doctors and other entrepreneurs in the Diaspora have been very receptive to the general call and quite a number have temporarily returned to Nigeria, bringing equipment and their skill. Doctors with special skill carry out surgical procedures in health care institutions to the benefit of the people. The NUC has also shown keen interest in Nigerian experts and scholars in the Diaspora. Linkage with those in the Diaspora began early 2003. Efforts were intensified in later years while the Commission announced another cycle of linkage with experts and academics under its LEAD Initiative in 2010-2011.

LEAD is conceived to attract Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora to contribute their quota to the development of Nigeria's University system through short-term academic appointments.

The major objectives of LEAD are to:

- Encourage the relocation to Nigeria on a short-term basis of academic and experts of Nigerian origin in the Diaspora to contribute to National development through engagement in teaching, research and community services activities in the Nigerian system;
- Tap from the expertise of Nigerian based outside the country for the improvement of the delivery of quality university education in Nigeria; and,
- Encourage healthy staff movement, interaction and collaboration across and between Nigerian Universities using these experts and academics in the Diaspora and with other sectors of education and national development.

Scholars in Information and Communication, Technology; Management Science and Business Administration; Mathematics; Medicine and Dentistry; Mining and Engineering; Natural Sciences; and Oil and Gas Engineering are specifically encouraged to participate in the LEAD Initiative of the NUC. Successful applicants may spend between 3 months and a year teaching in any of the universities in the country. A monthly stipend of \$2500 is paid and return ticket by economy class is provided to any of the participants in the Scheme.

The Federal Ministry of Education on its part has also been supporting the involvement of Nigerian experts in the Diaspora most especially in the field of medicine. Medical practitioners of Nigerian origin overseas are encouraged to come back home and make contribution to health services.

Some have hearkened to the call and have contributed and/or are still making contribution. Finally, some universities have been proactive in the engagement of scholars in the Diaspora. As shown in the discussion elsewhere in this paper on the study targeted at four universities, namely, Ibadan, Ilorin, Nsukka, and Ahmadu Bello in Zaria have established contact on their - own volition with overseas institutions in Canada and the United States. They have entered into partnership through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on staff and student ex-change, collaboration in research and publication. Linkage is not necessarily targeted at Nigerians under such Schemes but scholars of any nationality in the overseas institutions. One or two has/have taken steps to establish the structure and process for handling linkage programmes as well as for processing MOUs.

Objectives

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that a study was conceived to ascertain the social perception of linkage/partnership Initiatives between Nigeria's institutions and scholars/ universities in North America (United States and Canada).

The specific objectives of the study were to ascertain the nature of the engagement of scholars/institutions; reasons for establishing linkage/partnerships; scope; attitudes of scholars/institutions to linkage/partnership; whether they have subsisting ones with US and Canada institutions; the perceived benefits; challenges underlying linkage/partnerships etc.

By and large, the paper will attempt to examine how Nigeria's universities can be transformed from local to global centres of learning through linkage/partnership programmes based on the outcomes of the study.

Materials and Method

Setting

Four of Nigeria's were targeted in the study. They are the Universities of Ibadan, Nigeria at Nsukka, Ilorin and Ahmadu Bello in Zaria. These institutions were selected based on the following criteria:

- generation;
- location; size; and,
- reputation.

Ibadan University is the oldest one in Nigeria, founded in 1948 and located in the southwestern Nigeria. University of Nigeria is also among the first generation universities in Nigeria, founded a little over ten years after Ibadan. It is also a conventional university and located in southeastern Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is believed to be the largest land grant university in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a conventional university located in the northern part of Nigeria. It was also founded a little over ten years after Ibadan. And finally, the University of Ilorin, founded as a college of Ibadan in 1976 which later gained its autonomy. This is a second generation conventional university located in what is designated as the north central geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

Sampling

One hundred senior level staffs were initially targeted (25 from each) in the general survey while forty were to be indepth interviews conducted in each of the institutions. Table 1 below shows that 89 respondents completed the questionnaire in the general survey while 31 responded to the indepth interview. The proportions on returns are comparable in all the institutions.

Overall, two vice-chancellors, 2 deputy vice-chancellors, 27 deans/provosts of faculties/ colleges, 5 directors, 17 heads of departments, and 31 senior lecturers were interviewed. Moreover, 3 deans, 1 sub-dean, 2 heads, 7 directors accepted to be interviewed indepth in the course of the study.

The age of the respondents ranges from 40 to above 65 years. 93.3 of the respondents in the general survey were male as compared to 91.7 among those who participated in the indepth interview. The average length of service in the university system is about ten years.

All the respondents were spread around the faculties/colleges, with majority of the respondents in the general survey from humanities and the social sciences. Also in this context, are the following: 45 full professors; 10 associate professors; and 33 senior lecturers.

Data Collection

Three instruments were designed to gather data from four institutions in Nigeria who have presumably been involved in linkage programme with US and Canadian universities. The first was an institution questionnaire which was completed by the officer in charge of linkage “programmes of each institution. These officers were requested to indicate the:

- a. year when their institution began to enter into linkage/partnership; number of partnership/linkage programmes between their institution and US/Canadian Universities;
- b. number of staff who had benefitted by gender;
- c. number of students who had benefitted by gender;
- d. challenges they faced; and,
- e. the perceived benefits to their institution.

The second was designed to gather information from key officers and lecturers in the targeted institutions. The officers included vice chancellors, deputies in charge of academic programmes, deans of faculties across all disciplines; director of linkage/partnership programmes; and a handful of heads of departments.

The instrument covered the following issues: gender, position in the university, rank, knowl-edge of linkage programmes in the institution, duration of linkage with overseas institutions, reasons for establishing linkage, benefits of linkage/partnership, attitudes towards Africans in the Diaspora wanting to spend time at their institution, whether they previously benefitted from linkage/partnership and what was their experience etc.

The third was an indepth interview schedule, designed to gather information from staffs who previously benefitted from such programmes. The list of those who previously travelled abroad to spend their sabbatical/study leave in US and Canadian universities was obtained for the purpose of selecting some for indepth interviews. They were requested to describe the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). They were also requested to recount their experience and whether it was worth it.

Findings

Scope and current status of linkage/partnership in selected universities

Linkage between these institutions and US/Canadian Universities are at different stages. Some are robust while others are not as extensive. First, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria has collaborative partnership with two Universities in Canada, - York University, Toronto and McGill in Montreal and one US, University of Virginia. On the whole, twenty-one staff have benefitted from these linkage programmes, 5 male staffs in Canadian Universities; 11 male staffs and 5 female staff members in US schools. But linkage has not been institutionalized because it is only through departments rather than organized and co-ordinated from the Vice-Chancellor's office.

Second, is the University of Ilorin whose linkage relationships started in 2003. The institution has vibrant programmes with several universities around the world, -11 with institutions in Africa; 6 in Asia; 6 in Europe; and 31 in the United States.

Linkage programmes at Ibadan University began in 1981 with the University of Pennsylvania. By and large, Ibadan appears to have the most vibrant with US and Canadian schools among all the four universities. The institution has 31 with US schools and 2 in Canada. Conservatively about 50 staff members had benefitted from the programmes. About 70% male staff and the remaining female staff members have been beneficiaries.

Finally, the University of Nigeria at Nsukka has also established linkage relationship with US and Canadian Universities. It will be recalled that the university was nurtured in the early days by Michigan State University. Following the civil war, the link between Michigan and the university weakened. However, the foundation for relationship was already laid. And so it has continued to forge relationship with institutions around the world. Currently, it is linked to five US and one Canadian Universities. Eleven staff members (10 male and 1 female) have benefitted from such relationships. Furthermore, five male students and three female have also participated. The institution has put in place a structure and process for managing linkage. One of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors in charge of Academic doubles as the Director of Linkage Programmes.

Reasons for collaboration

Nearly 81 per cent of the respondents (80.9%) were aware of any linkage programmes with other institutions and most indicated that programmes with overseas institutions began not less than five years ago. They acknowledged knowing why their institutions entered into MOUs and advanced the following as reasons: academic exchange, capacity building, collaboration in teaching and research, internationalization of academic programmes, staff and students development, and postgraduate training.

Majority of the respondents claimed that their experience was beneficial. They identified the following benefits: affected their perception; enriched their capacity; provided opportunity to use state-of-the art equipment and use modern laboratories; attend conferences and meet leading light in their discipline; access current materials etc.

One lecturer from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, observed as follows when asked if it was:

Extremely beneficial, they have completely different academic tradition, setting, and practice. The scholars and the students are very current in their discipline because of intensive and extensive reading. They have well-organized academic schedules like seminars, conferences, and lectures (both public and academic lectures). They plan it and follow it religiously. You can hardly see any cancellation or postponement and every participant appeared as scheduled. Their scholarship is characterized with lot of humility. They have first class research facilities (internet, library, periodicals, books etc.) These are available and if you want a copy for yourself, it will be made available within 48 hours (Male lecturer in history).

Table 1: Breakdown of Sub-samples³

| Institution | General Survey | | Indepth Interviews | | Sub-total | |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| University of Ibadan | 19 | 21.3 | 7 | 22.6 | 26 | 21.7 |
| University of Nigeria | 22 | 24.7 | 7 | 22.6 | 29 | 24.2 |
| Ahmadu Bello University | 22 | 24.7 | 8 | 25.8 | 30 | 25.0 |
| University of Ilorin | 26 | 29.2 | 9 | 29.0 | 35 | 29.2 |
| Total | 89 | 100 | 31 | 100 | 120 | 100 |

Yet another respondent from Ibadan University, - a much more senior level faculty member than the foregoing who spent time at Northwestern University noted:

Extremely beneficial. The experience exposed me to the following: (a) advanced infrastructure for learning which also enhances tranquil study environment; (b) Quality assurance in delivery of services, both academic and administrative; and (c) mutually collegiate relationship between faculty and students (50 years old Director with 14 years teaching experience)

Finally, there is this female lecturer who simply affirmed:

Yes, networking with other in any field; visited historical museum; improved technological capacity writing on in teaching (36 years old female with 7 years teaching experience)

Perceived benefits of involvement in linkage

When asked whether there were opportunities in linkage judging by their stay in the US and Canada. Many felt that it provided an opportunity to network, attend conferences, publish jointly, sightseeing, and meet Nigerians in host institutions.

Challenges in Involvement in linkage

The stay of these teachers was not devoid of challenges as shown by the responses of a number of them. Some found the weather too harsh; others could not cope with the food or found adjusting a bit difficult.

One argued:

No challenges because people are friends, ready to guide and assist from residence to library and faculty.

Another claimed:

Initially due to different culture, I miss local foods. No obvious racism from Americans but I experienced it from Japanese who believed Nigerians sleep on trees.

One pointed out:

However, feeling of being a Nigeria; - a country of poor image was fear for me.

Finally, one was intimidated when he responded:

Yes; the institution was advanced far ahead of us,- facilities and teaching.

Interaction with Nigerian Scholars in Diaspora

The respondents were asked in the course of indepth interview if they believed that the linkage programmes between their institution and US and Canadian Universities should aim at attracting Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora and their reasons. Many are in favour and advanced the following:

One said:

The general Nigerian academic can be strengthened by their skill. Nigerians in Diaspora may have skill that will develop students and staffs in academia.

Another observed:

Yes, there will be loads of experience brought to our universities back home. It is not a secret that our universities are indeed substandard when it comes to facilities for both students and their teachers. Linkage should be geared toward having exchange ideas between institutions. It should not be one sided where only one is to benefit. It should enable North American counterpart to learn and appreciate the condition under which we operate. At the same time, engage them in proffering solutions to our local problems.

And so also:

Because they have quite a lot to offer, but one should be careful to attract core academics, not people who are not keen but stranded in the US or

Canada (Female Professor with 30 years teaching experience who spent a year in the US)

Yet another suggested:

Yes, Exchange programmes that will earn both staff and students credit. Exchange programmes that will allow the staff to earn stipend (dollars) from America/Canada institution. Exchange programmes that will allow the awarded to invite the host professors to Nigeria Allow for continuous and regular visit to, and from America and Canada.

Finally, there are these respondents who itemized the possible areas of partnership as follows:

- a. Staff exchange to teach our students
- b. Students exchange - both sides
- c. Joint research and joint publication
- d. Joint writing of research proposals to attract grants
- e. Training of our technical staff and laboratory staff
- f. Joint writing of research proposals to attract grants
- g. Training of our technical staff and laboratory staff

Majority of the respondents expressed the desire to welcome scholars from the Diaspora, believing they could make contribution to their institution. They will inject new ideas, bring novel techniques and approaches and ultimately improve the institution.

Summary of Findings

The universities that were targeted in the study have been involved in linkage programmes with US/ Canadian universities for upwards of five or more years. Relationships with institutions have been extensive and somewhat limited in scope. The rationale for establishing linkage is to promote staff and/or students exchange with a view to building capacity, promoting research collaboration, and also developing academic programmes.

Overall, linkage programmes have been found to very beneficial. The benefits are linked to scholars and institutions. Partnerships have made it possible for staff to be acquainted with advances in their disciplines, use new techniques and technologies, be exposed to modern laboratories and also establish networks. Linkage has also provided them ample opportunities to attend meetings and seminars. Thus, the opportunities are immense.

Spending time abroad has not been without it challenges. Some staff had problems with weather, getting around and making use of the opportunities. A few encountered racism. However, many others claimed that their hosts during their year abroad were friendly and supportive.

Contact was established with Nigerian and other African scholars in the Diaspora. Some welcomed them and assisted them during their stay. There is ample evidence that the scholars were receptive to coming back home to assist their home institution. The beneficiaries of linkage programmes also acknowledged the potential contributions that Diaspora scholars can be made to their home institution. They also generally felt that they should be encouraged to come back home to support their home institution.

The respondents identified possible areas of collaboration in linkage programmes. They include: staff and students exchange; collaboration in research and teaching; opportunities for postgraduate students to study or carry out their research in overseas countries etc.

Discussion

As has been found in the context of this study, Nigeria's universities are in different stages of linkage Initiatives. Some have had a long history of involvement with institutions in the north (high income countries) while others have not. While those that have had a long history like the University of Ibadan have already put in the structure and process for implementing linkage relationship while others seem to be operating in an ad hoc manner. Pooling human resources from Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora require more than anecdotal policies as are presently the case.

On the whole, Nigeria's higher education sub-sector which presumably should be one of the major engines for knowledge production is currently facing a number of challenges which are partly borne out in the outcomes of this study and which can also be garnered universities. Besides, the movement of faculty members from the older institutions to newer has depleted the number of teaching in the former.

The faculties in many of Nigeria's universities including the older ones have become bottom heavy. Even older ones like Ahmadu Bello in Zaria are making to do with numerous graduate assistants and Assistant Lecturers (most or all with first or the Masters degree) and just a handful of lecturers with doctorate degree in their discipline.

This was unlike the situation before the crisis in higher education when the minimum qualification for Lecturers was a doctorate degree. In some universities, young and inexperienced teachers were/are being appointed acting heads, or appointed by Vice-Chancellors to co-ordinate departments.

Some of the appointees do not possess doctorate degree in their field. The prospect of such low level staff pursuing their doctorate degree diminishes due to their teaching and administrative responsibilities. The country began to witness teachers of many years standing who are teaching without a PhD in their discipline and no prospect of obtaining one.

This situation has forced the NUC which exercises supervisory role over Universities through accreditation exercises to issue new guidelines on staffing. The NUC now insists that all teaching staff must possess doctorate degree in their discipline. Departments without the full complement of staffs with doctorate degrees may little chance of being accredited. This has put departments/universities on their toes and the university authorities have directed all

junior level faculty members without PhD to enroll and complete the degree in good time otherwise their appointment will be determined.

Universities and faculty members without doctorate degree have responded. On the one hand, the affected junior level faculty staffs have begun to scramble to obtain doctorate degree from any university whether in the country or abroad. But majority of them who already have family and children are pursuing doctorate degree within their university or nearby ones.

The universities on their own part have responded by quickly developing postgraduate degree programmes which often revolves around the grossly few faculty members who are eligible to teach and supervise students. It is undeniable that many of Nigeria's universities are ill-equipped to mount doctorate degree programmes. But do so to meet the demand of their interested junior level staffs. So today there is proliferation of postgraduate programmes in universities that can hardly run full-time undergraduate programmes!

The concern for quality in the wake of the proliferation of postgraduate programmes in universities that are least prepared to mount them is also forcing the NUC to introduce another accreditation regime for them. The concern of NUC is to raise the bar to ensure that quality postgraduate programmes are offered in Nigeria's Universities.

The development of postgraduate programmes which attract students who are also themselves on the faculty or of teachers who are encouraged to enroll in departmental programmes raises ethical issues which are not being addressed by Nigeria's universities. A teacher/ student working under a senior level teacher within same department places both of them in an awkward position. How self-less and objective can a supervisor be in the supervision of a colleague in the same department? How can an academic department effectively mediate in any matters between teacher/students and his/her supervisor who is also of his/her department? Can a teacher/student in self-sponsored journals.

Often, the articles that are published in such journals are not peer reviewed. It is also customary for these lecturers/editors to send their articles to friends who are always inclined to recommend them for publication. Nigeria is therefore awash with journals with outlandish titles like *international journal of so and so* in order to give the impression that they (i.e., the journals) are reputable.

A female teacher at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka said,

I developed good relationship with them. We discussed problems peculiar to Africa and agreed to work together for better results, particularly in the area of social work education:

A third, a teacher at the University of Ibadan intoned:

Nigerians are populous. The home is in turmoil. Those that escaped abroad have exceedingly upgraded their capacity and caught up to the

best global practices. Yet, they can be hosted by the university communities at home to impact on the homeland in Nigeria. They (in the Diaspora) still have the seed of the homeland in them and must be utilized to do so. They too must yield to it.

A male teacher with 21 years of experience in the university system who spent some time at the University of California asserted:

If we want to be global researcher, then there; should be global environment. Thus, we should try to attract those in Diaspora back home.

But one of the few dissenters said:

No, linkage should not be used to attract them. Cooperation between countries/departments should be the basis for such attraction.

A variety of strands of linkage programmes was identified by the respondents. One argued.

Another emerging trend is the tendency for home-based scholars to seek the support of Nigerian scholars in Diaspora in the laundering articles that are not peer reviewed as journal publications for hefty sums.

The principal goal of all these tactics is to obtain rapid promotion. Not surprising these self-sponsored journals are out of circulation shortly after they are established. They die after the authors of articles therein have used their publications to get to the top (i.e., become professor). The Appointment and Promotion Committees of many worthwhile universities have taken due notice of this trend and they describe as the Volume 1 No 1 syndrome. All articles of those seeking promotion are published in Volume 1 and No 1 of each journal cited in their CVs!

The above observations are not limited to scholarly articles but are also true of many of the so-called scholarly books that are published by home-based Nigerian scholars today. It is sad to say that many books that are not peer reviewed are printed by roadside printers. Book publishing is a thriving industry to the embarrassment of serious scholars. These books often contain glaring and unpardonable flaws such as spelling, grammatical, stylistic, and/or factual errors.

It is therefore not surprising that our home based scholars are no longer seriously reckoned with in world scholarship. They are no longer published in world class indexed journals. Many have resorted to local un-indexed journals out of the frustration arising from routine rejection by reputable international journals in various disciplines. The atrocities that are being perpetrated by many of the home based scholars today in the name of knowledge production have diminished their worth in world scholarship. Unlike in the past when Nigerian

scholars working in universities in Nigeria competed, and featured prominently in many high-brow and respected international journals, this is no longer the case. Few and very few are published in many authoritative and reputable international journals.

The foregoing discussion on the state of Nigeria's universities is aimed drawing attention to the possible role of Nigerian scholars in Diaspora in the retooling of the country's university system. It is undeniable that these scholars from the US/Canada can make contribution to home-based universities. Data from the study point the fact that home scholars recognize the competence of their colleagues in the Diaspora and are the view that they can contribute to the development of universities in Nigeria and that they should be encouraged to do so. They also identified a number of areas in which their home institutions can benefit.

Variants of collaboration

One can garner from the discussion so far that Nigeria has engaged its citizens in the Diaspora in a variety of ways. Three variants of linkage can be discerned.

The first variant is the one-to-one linkage between two institutions. Two institutions enter into an MOU that is co-signed. Here, the aim has been for a Nigerian University to enter into linkage with a university in the US or Canada on exchange of staff and/or students and/or for research collaboration or on the publication of research reports. This is what is in place in many Nigerian universities today.

The advantage of this sort of linkage is the opportunity for staff and students to use better facilities, be exposed to new techniques and innovative curricula, and also network. Another is to be able to pool human resources from a cosmopolitan faculty who may not necessarily be Nigerians.

However, a challenge is that those coming to Nigeria (especially foreigners) to work may find Nigerian environment stressful and weather inclement. Similarly, the Nigerians (as we have reported in the study) experience culture shock during their stay. By and large, a level playing field is necessary if Nigerians are to support one-to-one Initiative. This is because they (i.e., Nigerians) may not support any linkage that is lopsided (i.e., if the northern partners seem to be gaining more than them).

The second variant is the one currently being implemented by the NUC which is targeted at Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora and organized in collaboration with universities. Such a variant may not go down well with overseas universities which operate under rules that bar any form of discrimination in employment opportunities. For example, it is doubtful if a US or Canadian Universities will enter into an MOU that is specifically targeted at faculty staffs of Nigerian origin on their payroll because this may amount to discrimination.

This variant can only be implemented if it is independent of institution. Applications will be routed through a body like the NUC or donor agency working with host universities to place beneficiaries of such a Scheme. Can the first and second variants have the desired impact on Nigeria's university system? It is hard to say because the writer is not aware of reports that have evaluated them.

The third variant is about opening up the university system to encourage scholars in the Diaspora to come back home to take permanent and/or tenured appointment. This variant is not yet in place but it is worth exploring.

Nigerian university system is characterized by a *dosed* rather than by *open system* in career advancement. With the exception of new universities, lectures are often recruited from the lowest rank (i.e., as assistant lecturer or lecturer) and they progress gradually to the top through promotion from one rank to another until they reach the post of full professor.

This system is very much unlike an open one where attempts are made as a matter of policy to advertise and welcome faculty members from anywhere in the world to any position in departments. While an open system attracts, the close one restricts or limits the opportunity of outsiders to higher level posts such as senior lecturer, associate professor (viz., often referred as reader) or full professor.

An open system is one in which all positions are open to anyone from anywhere in the world. There is competition in an open system while the most qualified, whether internal or external candidate is recruited. On the other hand, a closed system restricts. Outsiders can hardly be recruited fill higher posts no matter how qualified or better qualified than local/in-house candidates.

The opposite is the case in a closed system. Here, opportunities are completely limited or not available. Highly qualified persons from other universities in the country and overseas do not stand any chance of being recruited to topmost faculty positions in the Nigeria's system. In other words, a Nigerian from Diaspora stands no chance of being recruited as associate or full professor in its closed system whereas this would be possible in a truly open system.

The advantage of this approach is that it will help to reduce *in-breeding* which is inimical to the development of the university system. The implementation of this variant can create room for competition among scholars and strengthened scholarship in the longer term.

However, this variant may be fiercely resisted by home-based scholars who may not be able to compete against scholars from the Diaspora. Scholars from the Diaspora are more likely to: (i) be published in good standing international journals; and (ii) have good track record of research, making them to be better placed than the home-based ones. The likelihood that the career progression of home-based scholars may be stalled through open completion may incur the resistance to this variant of linkage.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding, any linkage Initiative that is targeted at Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora deserves to be well-thought out. In my view, it will require a bold attempt at reforming the university system, transforming the system into truly international centres of learning as was the case in distant past when universities attracted teachers with cosmopolitan degrees and outlook from all over the world.

The reform of the university system is one of the effective means of bringing in Nigerian scholars from the Diaspora. An open system if this is truly the case will provide a window of opportunity for them to apply and take up temporary or permanent position at level commensurate to their experience/status. Another advantage of the open system is the opportunity for internal movement of faculty from one university to another (e.g., a staff from Ibadan going to work at Nsukka or vice versa). In other words, it will facilitate the free movement of staff from one university to another within the country; and promote *cross-breeding* instead of *in-breeding* as is currently the case.

It will necessitate opening the system by advertising and seeking qualified faculty members whether Nigerians within or outside our borders as well as foreigners. This will be a departure from the current closed system which is reminiscence of the civil service structure. Such a reform that opens the system is likely to encourage Nigerians in the Diaspora and foreigners to return to the country again.

Already many Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora are itching to return home partly for a number reasons among which are homesickness, failure to obtain tenure especially in North American Schools where this could be a real obstacle and source of frustration, the shared desire to contribute something to the fatherland as being demonstrated by Nigerian doctors who come home to render service in some hospitals free of charge or donate equipment etc, and the general feeling that their skill will always be better appreciated by their countrymen and women.

However, I am inclined to think that opening up the system will by no means be an easy task as home based scholars who have been used to the civil service framework for career advancement may be opposed to such a radical reform. Consequently, it is desirable to carry along the chief executives of universities and other stakeholders along in order to ensure that the Initiative is well received.

By and large, reform is an on-going exercise in Nigeria's universities. It is being spearheaded

by the NUC but its efforts at ensuring quality and transforming universities into truly international centres of learning is still feeble. Reform will be bolder and will also have long lasting impact if efforts are made to open the university system in the country to competition from within and without.

To sum up, Nigeria's university system must undergo radical reform, a reform that provides an enabling environment for returning scholars. Although the study has shown that home based teachers are receptive to the engagement of Nigerian scholars in the Diaspora, nevertheless the key questions are:

Will large numbers of them embrace an open system as proposed? Also, will all the stakeholders in the system be prepared to initiate a reform for an open system? These are the research questions that must be answered before a proactive policy of engaging Diaspora scholars can be adopted, and implemented with candour in Nigeria.

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² National Universities Press Release, 2012

³ University communities have proved the most difficult to study, with scholars who ought to be cooperative not willing to respond when approached for interviews. This accounts for the incompleteness of the number that was proposed at the onset of the study.