

TAG Editorial

Being Part of the Solution...

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I've heard it said that "alumni conventions are for the well-to-do- and those who are comfortable". More aptly, someone else characterized alumni conventions as moments of "lighthearted affairs. Old school mates and classmates meet, at times for the first time after several years. They reminisce, tell old jokes, wallow in nostalgia and in general have a good time." But beyond the far-from-home and faraway circumstances we find ourselves, alumni conventions such as this, are now forums for discussing serious public policies and nation building issues.

Here is the reality: Like CKC Onitsha, most schools in the states that constitute the former Eastern Nigeria, such as DMGS Onitsha, Government College, Umuahia, Queens College Enugu, Government Secondary School Afikpo, SPC Calabar, Queen of the Rosary College, Onitsha and Methodist College, Uzuakoli, to name a few, have functional alumni associations in the United States. Most hold annual conventions, and the common goal is to give back to their respective alma maters and keep the legacy going. But there is also the shared and broad awareness that the absence of good feeder secondary schools that offer qualitative education, would in years ahead, translate to poorly educated and ill-prepared students entering Nigerian universities, a sad reality that is already upon us.

So in the Nigerian context, one may ask: How is the nation doing in addressing the prevailing educational challenges? And what are we as members of the Nigerian Diaspora doing to assist the nation in reversing its educational blight? As we, members of Christ the King College Onitsha Alumni Association in the Americas, gather in New York for our 15th Annual Convention, we are mindful that one of the major challenges facing Nigeria, is that as a nation we seem to have forgotten the value of good education. Hence, we have no longer accord education the priority it deserves as a vital investment in human capital and a critical component of national development.

Naturally, some of us are doing our utmost to be enlightened problem solvers, distant as we are from home. For many Nigerians resident abroad, especially members of alumni associations like ours, aside from direct profit making ventures and extended family obligations, education remains the highest individual and community reinvestment initiative we undertake, with most funding going mainly into high schools (not universities). Alumni of CKC Onitsha resident in the Americas are no exception to such acts of altruism and selfless response to the clarion call to be *part of the solution* to the educational crisis facing our native land.

Failure, it is said, is a gradual process and the educational crisis we face did not happen overnight. Though the problems are largely systemic, arising essentially from bad governance and poor public policies, the fact remains that the educational rut in which Nigeria is mired, is multidimensional in nature. Where once a majority of the Nigerian population placed a high premium on education, today, there is an uncharacteristically broad unwillingness to go to school or to learn. Nigerian parents and students it seems, are no longer academically minded and those students who show a modicum of interest are let down by the visibly decrepit educational system and an increasingly uncaring society. Even if we set aside our collective lack of national discipline, the educational challenges we face includes, apathy, poverty, and student absenteeism, student disrespect for the rule of law and for the teachers, student tardiness, cultism, and parental indifference. Naturally and in tandem, youth unemployment, youth crime and youth violence are now common place. When the well to do ship their kids abroad, all they are saying, is the rest be damned!

Ironically, while most Nigerians are fixated on the acquisition of wealth, they fail to see quality education as the vehicle for credible and sustainable wealth creation and nation building. Today, the processes of buying and selling, and other forms of humdrum mercantilism are given priority over attending school. Comparatively, direct

public and private investment in educational institutions, infrastructure and emolument pales to investments in other sectors that offer immediate and huge financial returns. Across the board, education remains largely underfunded at federal, state and local levels. This is a national fallacy. Neglect or ignore it as much as we wish, in Nigeria the *right to education is a basic human right*. This is also true in the context of our national development goals. Indeed, achieving universal primary education by 2015, so that all children -girls and boys - can complete a full course of primary schooling, is ranked second on the Millennium Development Goals totem pole.

Various problems and their solutions are inevitable parts of humankind and its long history. However, just as the twenty-first century brings with it infinite possibilities; so too, are the challenges we now face. It is ironical that as the world becomes more educationally sophisticated, some nations, ours included, are experiencing educational retrogression, in every facet of that vocational endeavor. What is more worrisome is that the general population has become discernibly apathetic about education.

Today, little is said, if at all, about the connection between laying a good foundation for the future generation and leaders through education, and our long term political and developmental aspirations as a people. In an era, where the global emphasis is on information technology as a right; where it is underlined that "each State should thus develop a concrete and effective policy, in consultation with individuals from all sections of society, including the private sector and relevant Government ministries, to make the Internet widely available, accessible and affordable to all segments of population", our nation is lagging behind and some of us who have the ideas, vision and resources to bring about the much-needed change and be part of the solution, are reluctant to rise to the occasion.

Presently, many Legacy Schools and Leadership Academies like CKC Onitsha and Government College Umuahia are shadows of their glorious past. These are schools that produced some of the best and the brightest minds in Nigeria, most of which now reside abroad as recent statistics prove. As Migration Trends reports, "11 per cent of Nigerians with a tertiary education live outside their country of birth. The top destination countries for migrants from Nigeria are the United States, the United Kingdom...." The report also indicated that "Nigeria is by far the top remittance recipient in Africa, accounting for an estimated US\$10 billion" out of the \$21.5 billion remitted home in 2010 by African Diasporans.

As The Boston Globe reported in its 7 September 2003 article titled, "*Immigrants' US Dollars Paying off in Homeland*", "In Onitsha, Nigeria, the once-crumbling Christ the King College building has been modernized and expanded... Over the last several years, Christ the King College has gone through a massive renovation project, financed almost entirely by contributions from alumni in the United States...." CKC-AAA is by no means alone in the endeavor of *being part of the solution*. Whereas at the close of 2010, CKC-AAA has raised over N25 million toward CKC revitalization projects, the alumni of Government Secondary School Afikpo Alumni Association in America (GSSAAAA) had also raised over N35 million. Also, in 2008, GSSAAAA conceived the African Education Fund to promote secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa. These are selfless and noble goals worth rallying to.

The funds CKC-AAA remits periodically to Nigeria towards the revitalization of our alma mater, forms part of the overall Diaspora remittance, even if a minuscule portion. What this says, is that we are resolved to *being part of the solution*; and that we seek to be guarantors of *education as a basic human right*. If only a few more CKC alumni would join hands with us, we would certainly accomplish more. Here is a fact we cannot ignore. A good school like CKC Onitsha which is situated in a frenetic commercial town like Onitsha, will always be an oasis. Such good educational establishments including their boarding facilities – the type many of us experienced—offers a shield and protects innocent and impressionable youths from societal disorders. If we can contribute in any way to making such an environment available to some Nigeria youths, then, we would have succeeded in *being part of the solution* to some of our prevailing national challenges. Not much more needs be said.

As always, we thank our keynote speaker, special guests, supporters, benefactors, family, friends and especially the alumni of those other great legacy schools who strive to be like us. To my fellow CKC alumni, come on board and give back a little. Meanwhile, enjoy your stay in New York. Primus Inter Pares and May the fame of our college last forever. Primus! [TAG]
