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READING AND WRITING FOR
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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BY

OLADELE TAIWO



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DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University
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By

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READING AND WRITING FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

THE FACTORS which have influenced Nigerian education derive from Nigerian history. For a long time in history, Africa was regarded as a 'Dark Continent' mainly because it could not be easily penetrated. When eventually the 'Dark Continent' was penetrated, travellers and missionaries came out with dreadful stories, more imaginary than true, of human sacrifice, intertribal wars and abject poverty.

Mandeville's Travels, a monumental work about travels in foreign lands, published in the 15th century, helped to create an awareness about Africa and an appetite for more knowledge about the continent, its tradition, the manners and customs of its people. This publication added in no small way to the English-man's knowledge of Africa. But it was not altogether free of fantastic flights of imagination or the tendency to over-emphasize the 'darkness' of the continent and the primitiveness of the people. It, therefore, with similar books of this period, helped to establish an unfavourable image of Africa which writers, travellers and political adventurers have exploited throughout history.

This stock image was carried into the colonial period and was, in fact, used as a justification for colonialism. Colonial administrators helped for the most part to perpetuate this image. A notable example is George Alfred Henty.¹ As a colonial administrator during the early decades of this century, Henty provided inaccurate and largely imaginary accounts of Africa. His attitude was paternalistic in an age which tended to regard the African as inferior. Thus was started in the colonial period a tradition of writing which was damaging to the African cause and bore little relevance to the reality of the African situation. According to Killam, nearly all the so-called novels in this tradition failed to present believable portraits of Africans.²

It is the literary pretensions of the European writers of the early period and the misleading picture of Africa which

they project that seem to have affected most the literary consciousness of Nigerian writers. To them the one-sided picture was clearly unacceptable and must be quickly corrected. Africa has been judged by extraneous standards and, as it were, found guilty on false charges. Nigerian writers saw it as a national duty to reconstruct through various literary forms a Nigerian's Nigeria out of the ruins of history. To do this convincingly they base their authority on traditional culture 'within which art was functional and utilitarian as well as provided aesthetic pleasure'.³

In addition to the inspiration so acquired by Nigerian writers and their resolute determination to correct the misrepresentation of the African point of view, the situation which developed in Nigeria from the early 50's helped them to achieve their purpose. These conditions have been well documented in a scholarly work by Professor E. N. Obiechina.⁴ They only need to be summarised briefly here:

- (i) Greater provision for education — literacy and the broadening of consciousness;
- (ii) The spread of the mass media — radio and redifusion, T.V., newspapers, journals, magazines in English and Nigerian Languages;
- (iii) The cultivation and taste of a literate middle class educated at home and abroad;
- (iv) Cultural nationalism — the need to shed foreign yoke and ideas, and assert the uniqueness of the cultural past of a colonial people; and
- (v) The abundance and copious use of oral tradition in the content and language of works of art.

Given this situation, it is not altogether surprising that the Nigerian writer of prose, poetry and drama initially concentrated on the theme of culture contact and culture conflict, describing in detail the conditions which arise when an insidious attempt is made to impose one culture on another. It was for this reason that up to the mid-60's,

African imaginative writing in English concentrated mainly on the village green, the ancestral shrine and the mission school. There was also the tendency to blame the colonialists for all the ills of Africa. It was not until 1966 with the publication of books like Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and T.M. Aluko's *Chief the Honourable Minister* that the literary searchlight was turned inwards to the society. These works dramatize in all its nakedness the greed, corruption, man's inhumanity to man, political jobbery, moral laxity and social decadence which exist in society. A rounded picture of man in society is thus provided, African writing in English established in its own right, and an edifying kind of reading material produced for the inculcation and development of the reading habit. This has created the needed academic environment for the reading specialist to work and beat back the frontiers of knowledge in his chosen area of specialisation.

Before I go any further, I would like to pay tribute to some of those who interested me in this area of study and helped me along my chosen path since my undergraduate days. It is appropriate for me to remember today:

- (i) Professor Eldred Jones, former Principal of Fourah Bay College, Freetown who, as my lecturer at Fourah Bay College in the mid-50's, by his personal example, made reading and writing attractive to me as areas of academic concern;
- (ii) Dr. Ralph Staiger, Executive Director of the International Reading Association (IRA) who, by bringing me early into the top hierarchy of the IRA, exposed me to the various areas of reading research;
- (iii) Professor Bruce Pattison, formerly of the Institute of Education, University of London, whose interaction with me as a UNESCO Research Fellow in the early 60's strengthened my resolve to make notable contribution in the area of reading and writing;

- (iv) Professor T.A. Dunn of the University of Stirling, Scotland, who had the duty of supervising my doctoral thesis, taught me in difficult circumstances the joy of reading and writing for its own sake;
- (v) Professor John Povey, Department of English, University of California at Los Angeles, USA; and Mr. Christopher Heywood, formerly of the Department of English Literature, University of Sheffield, UK who provided beneficial experiences by giving me at every opportunity the chance to interact with their students.

Two institutions deserve mention as benefactors:

- (i) The National Library of Nigeria who for five years from 1981 to 1985 put me on centre stage in this country on readership promotion activities by appointing me Chairman of the National Implementation Committee of their Readership Promotion Campaign. This brought me face-to-face with the problems of reading at the grassroots; and
- (ii) Last, but not the least, the University of Lagos, when time were good financially, sponsored me to conferences on Reading and Writing at home and abroad, sometimes in very distant parts of the world.

II

My research studies on Reading and Writing are numerous and varied. They have been conducted with dedication and profit, and span about 20 years of my entire academic career. They cover all levels of education from pre-school to the university. Research findings have been embodied in articles and books from which many people and institutions have benefited. Only a few of those works can be mentioned on an occasion like this; I have intentionally selected those which have made strong academic impact at home and abroad.

My book, *An Introduction to West African Literature*, published in 1967 by Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., UK, is the first book on the criticism of West African Literature in

English written by a Nigerian. Another book, *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*, published by Macmillan Education Ltd. in 1976 is the first book of its kind devoted entirely to the cultural relevance of the Nigerian novel. Again, my book *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*, published by Macmillan in 1984 is the only book so far written in celebration of the literary activities of female novelists in modern Africa. This happened before 'Women in Development' became a popular national and continental slogan. Even in the highly competitive field of textbook writing one has been able to record some remarkable achievements. Macmillan Primary English Course is a composite work of 32 books, easily the most comprehensive series in the field in Nigeria today, and certainly the only one with Supplementary Readers tied to the Pupils Books. The Secondary School series which is now in the works is sensational in its prescription for the teaching and learning of English. One is naturally pleased to be strongly connected with works of such great educational significance.

Apart from books, some research studies deserve mention. In 1973 I was concerned with the problem of cultural relevance of reading materials in Lagos State secondary schools.⁵ I undertook a research study which concentrated on the Literature programmes in Forms One to Three in selected secondary schools with the aim of finding out:

- (i) how this correlates with the programmes in forms four and five; and
- (ii) to what extent any lack of cultural relevance poses a methodological problem.

Research Findings

Considered from the point of view of the relevance to indigenous culture of reading materials, some of the findings are of utmost importance. To start with, the returns show no particular bias for books written by Africans — the background against which a book is written rather than the authorship is considered the most important factor for the understanding of a book. Any writer, African or non-African,

who diligently exploits the African background in his writings, describes faithfully the customs, traditions, lore and way of life of the people, and shows creative intelligence is likely to gain acceptance. African books are read not necessarily because they are written by Africans but because they describe experiences with which the reader is familiar. The methodological problems which arise with books of foreign authors stem from the unfamiliar background against which they are written. Once the teacher takes the necessary steps to overcome this difficulty, the children are known to derive enjoyment and benefit from their reading of these books.

Encouraged by the impressive result of this research, I decided in 1974 to attempt an evaluation of the reading programmes in Lagos State secondary schools.⁶ It soon becomes clear to any research worker in this field that the reading programmes in Lagos State secondary schools are directly affected by the situation in the society at large. If homes are crowded and provide uninspiring atmosphere for study, if books and journals are few and good parental examples are hard to come by, if the home employment of the child is usually strenuous, time-consuming and un-academic, then a situation is created which retards rather than stimulates the reading habit. Where illiteracy is common and entertainments are largely communal, there is a natural tendency to capitalize on the oral traditions and collective cultural activities of the people, at times at the expense of reading. Only activities which tend to promote a sense of togetherness are encouraged. In this context, sitting down alone to read a book for pleasure may appear unnatural or even anti-social. Rural areas afford the quiet but not the motivation. Where the motivation exists in the city, other social factors militate against the cultivation of good reading habits. The result is the familiar picture painted by Paul Edwards as follows:

In 'English-speaking' West Africa not many people make a habit of reading just for pleasure. For one thing, not many know enough English to read it fluently, and those who can read in the vernacular tongues have only a few books to which they can turn. But even those who are able to read

in English and who can afford to buy books are not, on the whole, very interested in doing so. The reading that does go on above the level of the daily newspaper is mostly of texts for examinations, or books about the reader's profession.⁷

The need for further research into these matters was indicated. There is a particular area to which research can make a tremendous contribution — the tendency to use the written word as a traditional symbol. Nigerians, like most Africans, use symbols for every kind of purpose. When a Nigerian child reads slowly, regresses, does excessive eye fixation, is he at that state pausing to decipher the symbol from what he has read? When we complain, for example, that the child in a Nigerian school has difficulty with the return sweep when reading, could it be that he is taking his time to unravel the symbol presented by one line before moving on to the next or is it, as reading specialists would say, a plain case of eye-muscle difficulty? This is a point on which only fundamental research can throw an intensive searchlight.

Another relevant research study is titled *The Problems of Beginning and Developmental Reading in Nigerian Primary Schools*.⁸ With particular reference to Reading, two periods of great difficulty for the child are identified. The first period is during the first few weeks in school when the child is invited to engage in activities other than those he is already used to at home. Reading is one of such activities. Even when it starts with material in the vernacular, reading as an activity is new to the child and raises for him a number of problems, if not properly introduced and handled. The second period of difficulty occurs during the transfer after two or three years' schooling from the vernacular to English as a medium of instruction. Conflict arises from a situation where home conditions encourage the use of the vernacular (L_1) and the school sees it as its primary business to improve the child's efficiency in the use of English (L_2). This situation raises problems for the child and must be taken into consideration in the development of any meaningful Reading Programme. I felt in 1976 that not enough was known in

our circumstances about these problems and therefore set up this research project.

Reading for Personal Development

The problems of beginning reading should not be allowed to have a permanent damaging effect on the child's intellectual development. This is likely to be the case unless matters improve at the higher levels of education. Strenuous effort should be made by the combined force of home and school to overcome the difficulties of a poor beginning reader. The poor reader at the level of the upper primary or junior secondary school is easily identified by his poor performance in many of his school subjects. At this stage reading has become an instrument for development, for mastering other school subjects. It becomes a means of achieving success in public examinations at the stage of senior secondary. At the university level, reading has become fully developmental, functional and a means of acquiring public recognition and of achieving worldly success. This function continues after formal education has ended. The point to stress is that reading is a life-long activity. Those who enjoy reading derive pleasure and satisfaction from it. The aim of any beginning Reading Programme, therefore, is to lay such a strong foundation that the child can benefit from throughout life.

III

My greatest involvement in reading education resulted from my connection with the National Library of Nigeria which established a Readership Promotion Campaign (RPC) for Nigeria in 1980. I was made the Chairman of the National Implementation Committee from 1981 to 1985.

The Readership Promotion Campaign in Nigeria was conceived as an essential tool for the full intellectual and social development of Nigerians. It was aimed at encouraging reading and inculcating the reading habit for other than sheer utilitarian purposes.⁹ Other aims, as announced in the programme, were to ensure the provision of books and other reading materials adequate in number and variety, to identify problems which militate against the development of good reading habit and to initiate and execute activities

that will eliminate these obstacles. A useful strategy, adopted early by the National Implementation Committee, is to make people realise that permanent literacy is essential for the full enjoyment of life. It is one thing to acquire the ability to read; it is another thing entirely to develop the urge for reading. It is well-known that thousands of literate Nigerians do not read as a matter of habit. Since many of these are new literates, they soon become almost illiterate again. The time and money spent in acquiring the skill is wasted since it is not continually exercised. This is a great loss to the individual and the nation as a whole.

A carefully coordinated campaign programme was devised to achieve this goal. It was necessary to start by establishing a strong organizational base with the necessary infrastructure. With the high level of financial and logistic support given by the National Library it was not difficult to enlist the sympathy and active participation of writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians, media executives — people whose assistance was so essential for success. With a secure and active home base, it was possible to make contact with those parts of the developing world which were also formulating programmes for Readership Promotion Campaign. Countries like Cameroun, Kenya, Pakistan, Philippines and Malaysia readily came to mind. An exchange of views and materials with some or all of these countries was mutually beneficial. Again, it was necessary to maintain contact with the International Reading Association (IRA) which provided a lot of encouragement and useful advice. The IRA has the responsibility for coordinating the activities of Readership Promotion Campaign groups throughout the world. It can therefore act in the capacity of an efficient clearing house from which individual groups derive a great deal of benefit.

The procedure adopted by the committee was to visit the various states in the country at given periods to establish state branches of the Readership Promotion Campaign. As a result of a visit a state committee was formed which took responsibility for the work of readership promotion in that state. Care was taken to ensure that all vested interests in reading education were represented on the committee. The state library was put in control of a state branch while the national committee provided a liaison officer for each state committee.

It was hoped that before long the organization would permeate the grassroots with each state branch of the Readership Promotion Campaign going ahead to form Local Government Committees. At a later stage each local government Committee would be expected to found Readership Promotion Campaign units in schools and organizations in its area of jurisdiction. The ultimate goal was for the whole country to have a national committee; each state, a state committee; each local government area, a working committee; and practically every school, mosque, church, reading centre, library, youth organization, cultural and age group in each local government area, a unit of the Readership Promotion Campaign. This is indeed a very attractive organisational structure, and one that can rapidly advance the course of readership promotion in the country.

The structure envisaged makes it possible for the Federal, state and local government to be assigned varying degrees of responsibility. The National Library, as an agent of the Federal Government, will take overall control of items like the National Reading Week, survey of reading habit, reading seminars, co-publishing, and book quiz. It may also devise materials for a reading workshop to be conducted by the various states. A state government, through its library board, will be responsible for items like reading workshops, book exhibitions and bazaars, provision of reading materials and book clubs. The main responsibility of a local government under this scheme is to ensure that all the readership promotion activities devised by the state government are vigorously pursued in its area of authority. Apart from this, it will specialise in the inauguration of Reading Clubs or Book Discussion Clubs in schools, and the establishment of children's libraries by communities and individuals and, as appropriate, the setting up of farm libraries, as have become prevalent in Pakistan.¹⁰ More importantly, it will use all its resources to ensure that the school, as an agency of education, offers the child the necessary intellectual foundation upon which he can in later life build an interest in reading.

This is a scheme with great promise. But it also has its drawback. It is predicated on the assumption that each level of government will play its part well, that all official organs connected with reading will be interested and active, that a

reasonable amount of resource will be available for the campaign, and that there will be no clash of political authority. This is a tall order which can only be realised by a strong political will and a keen sense of social commitment.

Again, the Nigerian example seems to place burden of initiating a campaign squarely on the Federal Government. All the other levels of government take their cue from the central authority, and there is occasionally the feeling that it is a Federal Government affair in which the other agencies are merely helping out. The result is that some of these agencies go only just as far as the funding from a Federal Government agency, in this case the National Library, permits. There is hardly any serious thought of regarding the campaign as a worthy cause to which state and local government funds could be readily and adequately committed. This has been a limiting factor for campaign organizers, and has made it difficult for campaign objectives to percolate to the grassroots easily.

In the matter of readership promotion, Nigeria has a lot to learn from Tanzania. As in politics and social reforms, Tanzania seems to lean on her brand of socialism and *Ujamaa* settlements in bringing the benefits of reading to its people. For a highly motivated people, already galvanized for purposeful action in other directions, literacy and functional education are quickly embraced as accepted factors in the national development strategy. The result is that, in Tanzania, readership promotion is a matter of great interest to the generality of the people, designed to make the common man, especially the peasants, more useful to himself, his clan and state. This calls for an organisation concentrated mainly at the village level. It is not only the organisation but also the content of the programme that is oriented towards the villagers and peasants.¹¹ This is a far cry from the Nigerian example where as yet only a feeble attempt has been made to reach the villages.

IV

If Nigerians, generally speaking, have not fully imbibed the habit of reading for pleasure, they have certainly done better as writers. Whether the subject area is Economics, Chemistry, Banking, Engineering, Nuclear Physics, Medicine,

not to talk of Political Science or Education, there are many Nigerians willing to take the risk of writing. Imaginative works have borne the brunt of the literary audacity of Nigerians. Because of the prevailing harsh circumstances engendered by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) this audacity has almost attained the level of recklessness. In practically every part of the country there is a writer lying in wait with a manuscript for a publisher or printer to handle.

This development is perfectly understandable. When times are hard and almost socially unbearable, it is legitimate for citizens to create for themselves every kind of escape valve from hunger and misery. It is fortunate for Nigeria that one of the fallouts of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) is that many citizens have suddenly discovered the muse in them. This has created a congenial atmosphere in which writing has flourished. The writing may not always be first-class. But it has been enough in scope and extent to satisfy the intellectual yearnings of many a citizen, and has provided work for many a publisher who otherwise might have been out of business. Professor S.I.A. Kotei of Ghana refers with admiration to this state of affairs in Nigeria in his famous publication, *The Book Today in Africa* and calls attention to the phenomenon usually referred to as the Onitsha Market Literature:

A remarkable example is the Onitsha Market Literature which burst upon the Nigerian reading public in the 1950s. It was a phenomenon of literary profusion without comparison anywhere in Africa, before or since. In reference to the remarkable success achieved (in a financial and technical sense) it could be reported that printing and publishing had become eastern Nigeria's healthiest industry. Many of these 'industrialists' not only wrote their boy-meets-girl novelettes and rapid-results cram-books but also printed, published and sold them.¹²

If Nigerians from the evidence available are anxious to write or are willing to be pushed to write, why then do

we not have books in the right number and quality throughout the country? Why is there so much talk of book scarcity? Why are the few available books so expensive? Why is there such an unwholesome pre-occupation with textbooks to the detriment of other books for recreational and functional reading? Given such a large number of institutions of higher learning, why have Nigerian publishers shown such little interest in publishing for the tertiary level?

In an attempt to answer some of these questions one must start by saying that in Nigeria the book is, first and foremost, regarded as a product for sale, just like any other product — rice, matches, tyre, yam, caustic soda, lipstick. The profit motive is always uppermost. Not many take time to distinguish between industrial property, farm produce and intellectual property. If they did, they would be impressed with the more beneficial impact of the book on national development and treated it with greater respect.

A more crucial factor is the role of the many participating agents (and agencies) in the formulation and production of a book, any book — the author, the artist, the literary agent, the publisher/editor, the printer. As the quotation from Professor Kotei's work given above shows, these roles are not always separated in the Nigerian situation. Even where they are, the different agents do not usually extend to one another sufficient courtesy and decorum which are required for a flourishing book trade. This is the bane of the book publishing business in Nigeria. Each agency capitalizes on its role and tries to reduce those of some others in importance to its own advantage.

To take just one example, the roles of the author and the publisher are crucial in any successful attempt at publishing a book. To put it simply, the author originates, the publisher presents the material to the reading public. If either of these two falters in his assigned role, the result is unpleasant. It is even worse when they decide to play a game of hide—and—seek with each other. As I shall show presently, such situations are likely to develop when the publisher tries to maximise his profit at the expense of the author.

In spite of occasional lapses, one must assume that all participants in the book trade in Nigeria are honest, that they have as their sole aim the business of promoting education

and providing the reading public with qualitative reading material. It is on the basis of such an assurance that writers of all kinds — writers of professional books, writers of school textbooks, writers of imaginative works, writers of articles for the Press — can go about their business with the confidence that they are making their own contribution to the development of the nation.

Every Nigerian writer — old and new, learned or semi-literate — has his own perception of relevance. A writer of articles for the Press may be regarded as a writer-at-large in the way he deals with, at times competently, every conceivable subject. He writes exactly what he wants to write, only making sure that for his own comfort and safety he acts within the laws of the land.

The writer of school textbooks operates in a different situation. These books are usually based on agreed syllabuses prepared by government agencies or recognised professional organizations. Consider, for example, syllabuses for the various subjects approved for the new National Policy on Education. These syllabuses are so detailed that an unintelligent author may be tempted only to fill in the gaps and provide more examples in the name of writing a book. Only highly imaginative writers succeed in producing fascinating books or a series of books on such syllabuses.

There is also the need to vary the content and approach of school books to suit the various stages of education. The needs of each stage are peculiar to that stage. But generally speaking, there are certain criteria which good school books at any level should satisfy. There must always be a thorough coordination between approach, content, language and methodology. The major determinants of what is written, and how it is written and produced are the target audience and the level of education for which the book is intended.

The *publish or perish* requirement of the Nigerian academic and the establishment of University Presses, as is the case in other parts of the world, have helped to raise the quality and quantity of books available at the tertiary level of education. Nigerian universities and some other tertiary institutions insist that their teachers should demonstrate their inclination for scholarship before they earn their promotion. This usually takes the form of a research study leading to a

'recognised publication'. This seems to me a legitimate demand to make from an academic for advancement purposes. Unfortunately, the 'publish or perish' practice has become a bogey which many an academic would like to circumvent and still move up the professional ladder, if possible. The way it is sometimes applied, it is used to nullify all other contributions made by the individual to his university or society. Little wonder then that there have been several abuses in recent years such as plagiarism, fake letters of acceptance, the submission of books and articles printed, not published. These abuses are not altogether surprising. They were discussed at length not long ago in a series of articles in the *Nigerian Guardian* by Yusufu Tanko of the University of Maiduguri Press.¹³

I must now quickly dispose of two obstacles which are capable of undermining the national importance of reading and writing in Nigeria.

The first of these is book piracy. Publishers and writers lose money and suffer humiliation when their books are pirated by unknown persons. Writers alone lose money when there is an in-house piracy in a publishing house, whether it is organized or it is a solo effort. In either case the author is put at a great disadvantage. The fact can no longer be concealed that because of the fraudulent practices in a few publishing houses which think they do an author a big favour by paying him his correct royalty, the Nigerian author is constantly deprived of his legitimate earning and given, at times very late, something less than his total royalty for the year. It is ironical that the publisher who should cultivate authors and encourage them to write come to regard them as a great financial inconvenience, especially when their works succeed on a large scale.

The greatest threat to book publishing in Nigeria today is this lack of confidence between the author and the publisher. What makes this matter all the more frightening is that the greatest sufferers are the writers of school books. So this issue, unless resolved quickly, will almost certainly affect education adversely at all levels and further worsen the scarcity of books in our institutions of learning. Unfortunately, the Copyright Decree No. 47 of 1988 which tackled the problem of external piracy made no reference to the monstrous act of internal piracy. And quite under-

standably the Nigeria Publishers Association(NPA) which was most vociferous against external piracy has been reticent about in-house piracy, as if it never existed. It is in the interest of the association's self-respect as a credible organisation that members of the NPA should wake up from their slumbers in this matter and flush out the few bad eggs in their midst without further delay.

The second objectionable tendency which may affect the status of the book is the culture of launching a new book, which has become very fashionable. As a means of giving publicity to a new publication it may seem acceptable. But the way the practice has developed in Nigeria it has the dangerous side-effect of putting a false value to a book as a work of art and of falsifying altogether the purpose of book writing. It confronts a serious student in the subject area with the dilemma of finding out whether the work is fake or genuine. I would like to suggest that if a book must be launched, it should constitute a major landmark in publishing or be regarded as a monumental work which pushes back by a wide margin the frontiers of knowledge in the subject area.

V

After this somewhat extensive discussion of the reading and writing activities of Nigerians, the evaluation of our strengths and weaknesses and the roles played by the relevant agencies, I would like to make a few suggestions as to how we can enhance our present practice for national development.

- (i) To achieve literary excellence, books should be treated as special products. Polytechnics and universities should initiate courses in publishing, book development and distribution. This could be done through state publishing corporations or by sandwich courses with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). Technical colleges, library, schools and documentation centres, with the cooperation of international associations, can also commence courses in editing for graduate students.

- (ii) All the major agencies of education — the home, school, community and state — should work hard to establish the book as an important ingredient of education. To achieve the same purpose, all the agents connected with book production and distribution should treat one another with mutual respect. Honesty, here as always, is the best policy. They should stand united against any threat to their trade or any attempt to undermine their joint contribution to education.
- (iii) Reading centres and clinics should be established all over the country with programmes designed to stimulate the child's interest in reading. Such centres, with highly qualified staff, will be able to detect early symptoms of reading disabilities, discover their probable causes and determine the appropriate action which the teacher should take in each case. Cases of visual, auditory and physical defects, inefficient motor control, low mental ability and emotional difficulties should be referred to the school dispensary, educational psychologist or any special clinics set up for that purpose. In appropriate cases reference should be made to parents in order to have more facts about the child's background and medical history.
- (iv) The Library system in Nigeria will have to be given such a boost that it becomes responsive to the need of users at the various levels of contact — school, college, university, local government, state and the Federal Government. Each school, college, and, of course, university should have a reasonably well-stocked and functional library. It is ridiculous that universities are at times started in Nigeria without libraries! It helps the purpose of readership promotion if books are readily available for teachers, especially new literates, to choose from. Libraries constitute the power-house of knowledge, and an indispensable tool for the reader and the writer.

- (v) The Readership Promotion Campaign must reach the grassroots, capitalise on activities which have yielded dividends in Nigeria and elsewhere. Some of these are being planned; others, only recently identified — provision of suitable reading materials, survey of reading habits, appropriate use of reading workshops and seminars, book quiz, book exhibition and bazaar, and book tokens.¹⁴ The primary aim of any book exhibition will be to create awareness and demand for the materials being exhibited. With a bazaar accompanying an exhibition, a greater opportunity is created. The book bazaar is a fairly recent innovation in this country. It is different from other bazaars because the emphasis here is on selling out as many books as possible at very reduced prices.
- (vi) The decision to launch a book officially should always be taken on purely academic consideration by competent bodies like the Academy of Science, the Academy of Education, the Academy of Arts or subject associations like the Science Teachers Association of Nigeria, Chemical Society of Nigeria, Nigerian Economic Society, Historical Society of Nigeria, Nigeria English Studies Association and the Cartographical Association of Nigeria, to mention a few. Once such a decision is taken, the academy or association bears the cost of the launching and collects any proceeds which may accrue. The catalogue price of all the books sold at the launching goes to the author. Besides, he benefits a lot from the extensive publicity which his book would have received and the stamp of authority placed on his work. This is the only way to put an end to the tendency to trivialize and commercialise book launching in Nigeria.
- (vii) Young writers should learn to make use of literary agents. There is a tendency for them to take their first attempts straight to the publishers without ensuring that the works have attained a standard

good enough for the press. Literary agents have the responsibility for a fee, to bring about necessary improvements in a manuscript before sending it to the appropriate publisher for consideration. The interaction of a beginning writer with a literary agent is a necessary part of his process of learning. It saves him the heartache and disillusionment which come with a writer's first manuscript being rejected, at times without explanation. Fortunately there are now in Nigeria a few recognised literary agents who have established a good working relationship with publishers.

- (viii) Rapid reading is a sophisticated kind of activity which reading specialists in Nigeria must begin to teach to those who need it. It develops naturally from extensive reading, but requires a lot of practice and determination to achieve. The successful rapid reader reduces eye sweep to a minimum so that he can read straight down the page with his eyes focused at the middle. This skill is a great asset for people in authority who, by nature of their work, have to read several memoranda and reports daily. They can take their decisions based on the knowledge of the working papers rather than rely solely on the opinions of their subordinates.

VI

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Mr. Chairman, I have in this paper traced the causes and development of Nigerian imaginative and professional writings. I find that the harsh economic circumstances of recent years have helped to consolidate the Nigerian's love for writing and to increase not only the scope and extent of his works, but also his total output. External evidence has been adduced to show the enviable heights that have been attained and the capability of Nigerians to elevate writing to an instrument of national development.

Reading is introduced as a complementary activity to writing. The obstacles in the way of the development of good reading habits are discussed with reference to the results of three research studies and the Readership Promo-

tion Campaign run by the National Library of Nigeria from 1981 to 1985. The evidence here shows clearly that Nigerians are more anxious to write than to read. Yet, there is need for what is written to be read, and widely too. Inevitably the central product of reading and writing, the book, is examined. The roles of some of the participants in publishing and the book trade are critically discussed with the aim of helping them to improve their practice. The paper ends with a list of suggestions which, if implemented, may significantly raise the standard of our writing and reading education.

It now remains for me to make honourable mention of those agencies whose activities bear healthy relevance to reading and writing but which, because of constraint of time, have not been given sufficient attention in this paper: the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) adopts an academic approach to its work, but it has recorded signal success during the short period of its existence. So also is the Children Literature Association of Nigeria (CLAN) which has become almost a household name only after a few years in the field. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and the Nigerian Booksellers' Association (NBA) have remained progressive and active in their various fields. I should also mention the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), which under its present able leadership, is involved in several activities beneficial to Nigerian education, and our dynamic mass media which have provided unlimited opportunities for many Nigerians to read and write. These bodies have helped in no small way to promote in this country reading and writing education for national development.

As a special tribute, I would like to express my gratitude to members of my family who, with beneficial results, have endured my literary eccentricities and frequent periods of hibernation over the years. I am particularly grateful to my wife who always played her part of wife, mother and confidante successfully. She often had to combine all these with the professional role of secretary, especially when both of us are outside Nigeria. The result is that the final drafts of most of my books were produced by her.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that Reading and Writing can be used as a means of social cohesion and political integration. They provide an acceptable medium of cultural education, help to detribalise the individual and infuse in him a sense of national consciousness. In the Nigerian situation the more we read and write about other groups and localities, the more we know about them. With greater understanding there will be less friction. A stable political atmosphere, so essential for rapid economic development, can then be created. The citizen develops a feeling of cultural pride and national responsibility. In this way reading and writing become an instrument for achieving national solidarity.

I thank you all very sincerely for your attention.

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NOTES

1. George Henty, *By Sheer Pluck*, 118 quoted in G.D. Killam, *Africa in English Fiction, 1874 – 1939* (1968), 21.
2. This topic is further pursued in Chapter One of my book, *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (Macmillan, London, 1976).
3. E. N. Obiechina, 'Cultural Nationalism in Modern Africa Creative Literature', *African Literature Today*, No. 1, 1968, p. 34.
4. Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (C.U.P., 1975).
5. See Oladele Taiwo, 'Cultural Relevance of Reading Materials', *Reading: What of the Future?* Donald Moyle ed. (Ward Lock Educational, London, 1975), pp. 261 – 66.
6. See Oladele Taiwo, 'An Evaluation of the Reading Programmes in Lagos State Secondary Schools', *The Content of Reading*, ed. Asher Cashdan (Ward Lock Educational, London, 1976), pp. 219 – 228.
7. Paul Edwards, *West African Narrative* (Nelson, London, 1963), p. 1.
8. See Oladele Taiwo 'The Problems of Beginning and Developmental Reading in Nigerian Primary Schools', *Mother Tongue or Second Language?* Dina Feitelson (International Reading Association Inc., Newark, 1979), pp.90–96.
9. This section has benefited from an unpublished Seminar Paper titled 'The Prospects and Challenges of Planning a National Readership Promotion Campaign: The Case of Nigeria' presented by me at a National Seminar on the Promotion of Reading, July 24 – 28, 1984 at The University of Lagos.
10. For a discussion of farm libraries in Pakistan; see, for example, Ralph C. Staiger, *Roads to Reading* (UNESCO, Paris, 1979) p. 85.
11. Ralph C. Staiger, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
12. S.I.A. Kotei, *The Book Today in Africa* (UNESCO, Paris, 1981), pp. 73 – 74.
13. See "The 'publish or perish' game" (1) & (2) in *The Guardian*, Lagos 29/9/89 p. 13, and 30/9/89 p. 11.
14. For a brief discussion of book tokens see Mrs. J. A. Ugonna, letter dated 16th March, 1982 written to the Editor, *Daily Times*, Lagos.

