

LEVERAGING SOCIAL DIALOGUE FOR STABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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KEYNOTE SPEECH

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Introduction

Higher education refers to post-secondary school level of education with the roles of teaching, research, manpower production and community development. Nigeria as the giant of Africa should continue to set the pace for others to follow, as it used to be, considering the numerous talents and natural resources the nation has been endowed with. However, instability and lack of conducive environment have eroded the quality of higher education.

Types of higher educational institutions in Nigeria

There are several types of higher educational institutions in Nigeria, but the four most common are: those that offer university degrees; those that offer national diplomas; those that offer teacher training; and those that offer a variety of professional and skill certificates. As at February, 2018, Nigeria had 144 universities comprising 40 federal universities, 43 state universities and 61 private universities. The number has increased to 158 universities, 104 polytechnics and 82 colleges of education.

What is Social dialogue?

Social dialogue is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of government, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It can be formal or informal and can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management. It describes a situation where the social partners – employers

and worker representatives (and sometimes governments in a tripartite framework) engage in a constructive and ongoing dialogue and negotiation over labour laws and regulations.

Conditions for Social dialogue

According to ILO, for social dialogue to take place, the following must be established:

- Strong, independent workers' and employers' organisations with the technical capacity and the access to relevant information to participate in social dialogue;
- Political will and commitment to engage in social dialogue on the part of all the parties;
- Respect for the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining; and
- Appropriate institutional support.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining

The highest form of social dialogue is collective bargaining to foster the quality of education, status and morale of teachers. There is need for a broad-based re-engineering of the interrelated dimensions of motivation in different educational institutions to re-focus on education sector implementation of the relevant policies and agreement.

Strong and inclusive public education systems are essential to the short- and long-term recovery of society and that there is an opportunity to move toward powered-up schools.

Objective of Social dialogue

The main objective of social dialogue is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders in the world of work. Successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues, encourage good governance, advance social and industrial peace and stability and boost economic progress.

Value of Social dialogue

It is a valuable means of protecting and promoting the interests of workers by extending democracy and human dignity to the workplace. It is also a well-tested instrument for managing social and economic change while maintaining consensus and stability in society.

How can it work?

For social dialogue to work, the Federal Government cannot be passive even if it is not a direct actor in the process. According to ILO requirement, social dialogue is responsible for creating a stable political and civil climate which enables autonomous employers' and workers' organizations to operate freely, without fear of reprisal. Even when the dominant relationships

are formally bipartite, the State has a role in providing essential support for the process through the establishment of the legal, institutional and other frameworks which enable the parties to engage effectively.

The urgent need for social dialogue

- ❖ To ensure that public schools play a critical role in reducing inequality and strengthening social cohesion. By having the mandate to serve all children and youth regardless of background, public schools can bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds and needs, providing individuals the opportunity to grow up with a set of ethics and social values that can make communities more peaceful and progressive.
- ❖ To get better working environment and conditions of service for the Lecturers who had spent so much time and resources to get the required chains of degrees but are not adequately remunerated/appreciated.
- ❖ To ensure that Nigerian children attend the best public educational institutions and have the best of facilities and infrastructure that can compete globally.
- ❖ To address the challenge of under-funding. One of the major problems facing higher education in Nigeria is under-funding. The private sector has an important role to play in education—from advocating that governments invest in high-quality public schools because they help power economies and social stability to helping test innovative pedagogical models in independent schools.

Post- COVID19 and the new normal

It would be valuable to take a cursory look at education on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic. The central role of education in the economic, social, and political prosperity and stability of the nation is so obvious and should be well understood by the public. Now is the time to chart a vision for how education can emerge stronger from this global crisis than ever before and propose a path for capitalising on education's newfound support in virtually every community across the globe.

The coronavirus pandemic has put the topic of engagement with parents and families at the center of current education debates, and education leaders across the globe are finding out just what powerful support parents can be in their children's learning—including parents from the most marginalized communities.

Conclusion

Emerging from this global pandemic with a stronger public education system will require both financial and human resources. Articulating such a vision is essential, and that amid the myriad of decisions education leaders are making every day, it can guide the future. With the consequences of the pandemic hitting the most vulnerable young people the hardest, it is tempting to revert to a global education narrative that privileges access to school above all else. There should be education innovations that provide access to relevant learning for those in and

out of a school building. A powered-up public school in every community is what the students deserve, and indeed is possible if all stakeholders can collectively work together to harness the opportunities available to bring out the best. Higher education institutions must cater for different needs of learners and employers because having a vision of the change we want to see can help guide our discussion, debate, and ultimately our actions in the right direction.

A critical look at the issue of too much emphasis on paper certificate (rather than the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes) that has led to high rate of graduate unemployment or under-employment should form part of the social dialogue for the stability of higher education in Nigeria.