

Importance of Equal Education in Nigeria

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The world we live in is not a fair place and we are not all born into this world through ideal circumstances. Despite Thomas Jefferson's idealistic sentiment, all men are not created equal and not all people are privy to equal opportunities. This grim reality is illustrated in most places in the world, but especially true in third world countries. The country whose interests are dearest to my heart is the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Nigeria is a classic example of a nation where the divisions between the upper and lower classes are exceptionally stark and the divisions are exacerbated by a dwindling middle class. I won't discuss philosophically whether or not it is fair that certain people are born into greater privilege than others because that is simply an unfortunate but unavoidable fact of life. However, I am greatly concerned by the lottery we play in Nigeria concerning the education of our youth. This unequal access to education is the origin of what perpetuates classist divisions in Nigeria. To truly understand how severe the social divide in Nigeria is, consider these facts: Nigeria is the fifth largest petroleum exporter in the world (CIA, 2010). Approximately 142,000 Nigerians visited the UK in 2011, spending an average \$172 per day on luxuries like designer clothes and shoes (Elbagir, 2013) and if the \$1.5 million that Nigerians spent on UK schools was spent in Nigeria, this would amount to 60% of their educational budget ("Why Nigerians Prefer Schooling Abroad", 2013). We must ask ourselves how it is possible that a country with such wealth also has 72 % of its population living on a dollar a day or less (Unesco, 2013), a 51% illiteracy rate (Unesco, 2013), and a mere 4% of secondary school students go on to enter post-secondary institution five years after graduating (Unesco, 2013). The primary cause of this statistical inequity is one which has plagued humans since the beginning of time, the human weakness of greed. Echoing, biblical history when Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty silver shekels, Nigerian politicians betray their own people for millions

of dollars a year. There was a time when Nigerian schools delivered an effective education to the extent that there was little difference between sending your children to a local school and sending your children to a school abroad. There was also little distinction between a child who had been educated at a public school and one who had attended a private school because the public school system was quite strong. However, problems slowly began to arise after Nigeria gained independence from the British in 1967. What followed was a mad grab for power, similar to a more chaotic version of the oligarchy/privatization of Russia in the 1980's, through numerous military coups. As the British became less involved in Nigerian affairs, Nigerian politicians felt more liberated to channel public funds into personal accounts. Individuals in the private sector with the capability to oppose this injustice were content with sending their children to highly exclusive private schools while the dwindling middle and lower classes were left to send their children to schools that would not effectively prepare them for future jobs. Today, many Nigerians who have achieved financial stability are too worried about maintaining their wealth to be concerned about the welfare of the lower class. Unfortunately, I am not convinced that we as Nigerians are prepared to solve this problems by ourselves and the task of resolving this issue will have to fall on the proverbial shoulders of international non-profit organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation. I have a long-term vision to revamp the education system in Nigeria, and other third world nations, to ensure that everyone in this world is given a fair chance to strive for their goals. The organization would be based in a major Nigerian city such as Lagos and would be open to boys and girls ages 14-17 across the country, with future plans to expand across the continent. The initiative would be funded by donations and possibly by levying taxes on the top earners in Nigeria (by implementing luxury taxes and taxes on certain private schools). I believe that the Nigerian

government would be willing to support such an initiative because of the potential recognition and voter support that they would receive. The initiative would also be funded by corporate donations from companies seeking tax write-offs and improved public relations. The aim of improved Nigerian schools would not be for students to simply graduate secondary school but for these graduates to attend world class universities across the globe. The non-profits could create partnerships with universities around the world whereby students coming from the schools would be able to enter for a discounted tuition rate, which would be subsidized by scholarships. If this initiative were to become successful the benefits would transcend beyond Nigeria and would be a source of inspiration for any nation with a struggling education system, especially third world countries. This model is not limited in its applicability to Nigeria, but rather could be applied in developing countries all over the world because education is a right which all human beings deserve access to. I believe that this is the most important human need, after basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter have been met. Education is so important because it provides people with an opportunity to live better lives in the long term rather than simply giving them enough to survive today. Education is what I like to call the great equalizer and one must simply look at human history within the last fifty years to understand the true value of an education. Without access to a strong, affordable education, Barack Obama would not be the president of the United States. While, some may argue that Barack Obama is a rare exception and very few people have the means to go to Harvard, it is also important to understand that without a quality secondary school education he would not have even had the opportunity to earn the spot at Occidental College or Columbia University which eventually led him to Harvard. This is essentially the purpose of receiving an education, it provides people with a fair chance to strive for a better life with a better understanding of the value of education as a means to achieve it, and

with the opportunity to reciprocate and allow others to experience the same advantages. The old adage comes to mind: give a man fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. I would be so bold as to add that when we provide people with a sufficient education, we give them a fair opportunity to feed themselves, their peers and future generations.

[Word Count: 1,134]

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