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## **University-Community Relationship in Re-Packaging University Education for Great and Dynamic Economy**

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### **Abstract**

*Mutual relationship - in university community is beneficial to both university and community. The cordial relationship of the institution and its community results in peace, stability and security. Public institutions are responsible for accountable utilization, of the taxpayers' money. The community also benefits from the universities in terms of economic gains, social and communal services as a result of cordiality between the duo. As global environmental changes are on the increase, pro-active participation in economic development must be encouraged, to reduce dependence on government subvention.*

### **Introduction**

The question of how tertiary institutions should relate to the outside world and how the outside world should relate with tertiary institutions is as old as these institutions. It is a problem that has been revisited, usually, at times of expansion of the institutions, but also in the context of changes in the organizations of the economy and society generally. The fact that this problem has always been topical is indicative of the need to strike a balance between the three key elements - the generation of new knowledge, the passing of this knowledge to future generations and serving the needs of the economy and the community.

- There are a number of developments in the contemporary environment, which have important implications for the way these institutions link to their local communities. At least five components of change call be

identified:

- Increased demand by the Nigerian society/ Populace for higher education and inability of the institutions, to cope with the societal demand;
- Dwindling funding by government and the need to generate funds to provide facilities and create conducive environment for learning and research;
- Increased demand for skills and knowledge, in all aspects of work, especially in the area of information technology, provision of facilities to train and educate students and conduct research;
- The shift from residential to non-residential institutions and the large number of students left unaccommodated even in institutions with residential facilities; and
- The trend by government to reduce funding of social services and divest from direct provision of economic activities through the process of privatization and commercialization.

All these factors are national and international in character; they all have implications for different aspects of management of these higher education institutions, hence, the relevance of the topic of this paper to the contemporary problems facing these institutions.

On point of note, by tertiary institutions we refer to institutions responsible for production of high-level of manpower including the universities, the polytechnics colleges of technology and colleges of education. They are also responsible for generation of new ideas through research, passing these to future generations and rendering services to the community (Adesina, 1977).

Focus of this paper is on the universities and their relationship to their communities. Essentially, the paper is subdivided into four parts. The first part looks into the issue of universities and their internal publics and external communities. The second part focuses on the relationship between the universities and their communities. The third part explores how the relationship can be utilized for all round development of the universities and the community. The fourth and final part is the conclusion on the way forward for the emerging relations between universities and their communities.

### **Universities and their internal publics**

The internal publics of a typical university are made up of the following:

**Governing council:** Universities in the public sector like other higher institutions in the public sector have at the apex of their organization structure, a Governing Board. The composition of which must represent the diverse interests in the state or in the case of federal institutions reflect federal character. This is in conformity with Section 14 Subsection 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The constitution thus recognizes the need to allow representation of the diverse

interests in the community in the management of universities and other agencies in which government has controlling interest. The Governing Board is responsible for formulating overall policies on the physical development, finance, appointment and disciplinary control over staff, and public relations. Also, on membership of the Governing Board of universities are the Vice-Chancellor, as the Chief Executive Officer who is an Academic Staff; representatives of the Academic Board the highest academic body of the university and representatives of staff. This is to ensure that the interests of staff as well as the interests of the larger society are taken into consideration when policies are formulated for the university (Akangbou, (1987).

**Academic board (senate):** The Academic Board, as the name implies is a committee, of the most senior members of academic staff of the university comprising the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Deans and Provost and Heads of Departments. This body is responsible for formulating all academic policies of the university. Where the policies have financial implications, the Governing Board must give consent for implementation. All matters including, admission of students, disciplinary control over students, release of examination results and so on are the sole responsibilities of the Academic Board.

**Management committee:** The management committee comprises the Chief Executive Officer/ Vice Chancellor and other principal officers including the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar and Librarian, the Deans and Heads of Services Division. The body is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor, Chief Executive Officer for the day-to-day management of the institution.

**Staff unions:** The members of staff in the university have their unions: the Academic Staff Union, which comprises all academic staff of the university; the Senior Staff Association, comprising all senior non-academic staff; and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASD), comprising all junior non-academic staff. The unions are responsible for negotiating better welfare packages of members of the unions and to ensure that all union members are justly and equitably treated, while serving as local units, of their national bodies.

**Students union:** The membership of the students union is open to all students` of the university on regular programmes.

These are the major bodies constituting the internal publics/community in the university often with diverse and occasional conflicting interests. Most of these bodies either as a whole, group or as individuals also relate with similar external bodies, especially the staff unions and the students union. There are also professional associations, social and cultural clubs.

### **Internal publics and intra-university relationship**

The functions and dysfunctions in the interplay within and between the various

publics covering council, academic board, management and the unions/associations will of necessity, determine the nature of university community relationship as to whether it is:

- Friendly or unfriendly
- Vibrant or not vibrant
- Rewarding or not rewarding

In essence, the level of organizational health arising from intra-university relationship will determine the larger university community relationship (creating an enabling environment) (Adewuyi, 1975). Therefore,

- Governing council acting on behalf of government should be satisfied with its superintending roles by ensuring that sound policies are put in place, decisions of council implemented while protecting itself against any form of dysfunctional politics of organization.
- The Vice-Chancellor as the Chief Executive should ensure that administration is sufficiently participatory in the conduct of the day-to-day affairs of the university.

### **External communities**

Prominent among the external communities to the university are the alumni association comprising all past graduates of the institution (though creating an inter-phase), the immediate physical community, the state and the federal government and their institutions especially those set up to regulate and moderate on functions of the universities. There are also donor agencies, local, national and international who provide grants-in-aid, study fellowship and sponsorship, etc (Akintayo, 2002).

Since the external communities that relate with the university are numerous, for the purpose of this paper, the relationships have been broadly classified into relationship with:

- the local economy;
- the physical surrounding of the city/town where they are located;
- government and other agencies and lastly;
- local/civil society in the area of accessibility to education, sports and cultural facilities and contribution to the voluntary sector.

### **Relationship with physical surroundings**

From historical and institutional context, the siting of a university within a location has implications for the physical development of their surroundings.

First, we could have university town, in which case the siting of the university actually, gave rise to the development of the town or city. Secondly, some universities are cited within an already developing city or town. Thirdly, universities more often than not in the Nigerian context are established to cater for state and regional needs/ demand, which could be cited within city/town or out of town campus.

The image and perception of university town is synonymous with that of the university. This is because the core economic activities and services at the initial stage of the development of the town are determined and propelled by the immediate needs of the university; in the of provision of accommodation for staff and students; provision of goods and services to meet the domestic needs of the university community and so on. There is a tendency to have a higher degree of interaction, between the local community and the university than in a university situated within a core urban area with other big institutions industries and services around. It must be emphasized that even in, university towns not all employees of the university will necessarily live and spend the bulk of their income within the area; whereas for universities situated within cities the converse is likely to be the case.

#### **Local economy and economic development**

The most immediate impact of the university on its local community is through its role as an employer. The policy of government that higher institutions should recruit majority of their junior employees from the locality, has further ensured closer and mutual relations with their immediate community. In some cases, up to 70% of junior staff resides in the immediate community. In some instances, universities are the largest employer of labour in the locality where they are situated. Quite an appreciable proportion of staff in some of these institutions however lives outside the immediate community, especially, where the level of infrastructures, such as motorable roads, electricity and water supply is still very poor. The presence of universities in communities has a way of facilitating speedy provision of infrastructure in their immediate community including industries and economic activities (Akpa and Ameh, 1985).

Though, direct creation and maintenance of employment is the most obvious form of economic impact of universities in their local communities, the effect extends beyond employment to embrace local purchase of goods and services by the university itself as well as staff and students.

To meet the demands of university community investment from outside the immediate community is bound to be significant particularly for universities situated out of town. The expenditure by the university community on goods and services shall include; staff expenditure, non-wage expenditure, equipment and capital expenditure, students' expenditure and students' union expenditure.

The economic impact of a university is also felt in localities outside the immediate community of the university, the extent of which depends on

- proportion of staff living outside of the locality;
- the expenditure of . all staff and students outside of the locality (e.g. shopping in adjacent areas);
- the proportion of students who are non-local (i.e. generate new income to the locality);
- the capacity of local firms to support the needs of the college. .

Thirdly, the demand on housing and accommodation facilities is high especially when the institution is expanding its student intake and the internal facilities cannot cope with the rapidly increasing staff and students strength. The effect of this is the increase in the economic value of residential properties. To cope with the new demand for accommodation there may be massive investment to provide residential facilities and the consequent multiplier effect on other sectors of the local economy and the economy of the area outside the immediate community.

In the area of economic development, universities by virtue of their mission are expected to produce middle and high-level manpower for teaching in educational institutions at the primary and post primary level.

Essentially, the universities are regarded as public services. However, the trend in the developed countries, especially the United Kingdom since the mid 1980s is tile emergence of utilitarian redefinition of the functions of institutions. Under this new thinking, higher institutions are perceived as possessing all the diverse expertise and skills that can be of immense usefulness to the economic activities in their society. They have departments of engineering, departments of finance and accounts, business school, marketing departments, highest level of skills oil performing and creative arts, they have research expertise at a level which generally few other organizations would even aspire to. This immense human capital, according to the new thinking, can be proactively utilized in either direct productive economic activities or in consultancy services that could have tremendous impact on the economic performance of the society rather than current satisfaction to remain theoretical.

### **Relations with government**

Until very recently, almost all the universities in the country arc government owned. Even for privately owned universities, the relationship with government is still very strong. The functions of all universities are regulated by government policies through the National Commission for Universities. A good example is the adoption of the 6-3-3-4 education policies and its emphasis on vocational education (Adejumobi, 1977). This policy necessitated re-training of existing teachers and change in the curricula for university.

Government is also a large employer of the graduates of the universities. For instance, in many states, the staff strength of the Post Primary Teaching Service Commission is bigger than the staff strength for the entire civil service.

The issue of adequate funding of government owned tertiary institutions has been problematic, with an economy that is propelled by revenue generated from sales of crude oil and increasing demand from all sectors, the allocation to the education sector has been dwindling. Since the internally generated revenue base of the universities is not adequate, this has created problems for most educational institutions in public sector. Most of these universities have not been able to maintain existing facilities, which have affected the quality of education negatively. The current trend by government to privatize and commercialize services which can be better handled by the private sector, expectedly will reduce wastage and make it possible for government to have more money to allocate to the education sector and other sectors.

Government has also been assisting in the area of securing international grants, aids and sponsorship for academic and physical development of universities and other tertiary institutions. The setting up of the Education Tax Fund is a good initiative taken by government to collect surplus fund through taxation and re-allocating this to fund development of education in the country.

The responsibility of government does not stop with the release of funds to these institutions, the responsibility also includes ensuring that the funds released are judiciously utilized. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that public institutions utilize public funds for the purpose for which they are released. Government also has the responsibility to ensure that the interest of the society and the purpose for the establishment of higher institutions are accomplished. Universities and other public institutions must provide value for money that is why occasionally visitation panels have been set up to examine the performance of higher institutions, ensure that they remain focused and to fashion out new way forward for these institutions.

### **Social community development**

Universities play significant role in the social and economic life of their community. To ensure that the immediate community benefit from the siting of the university in their vicinity, concessionary admission policy and recruitment policy for junior staff are provided as social services to these communities (Akangbou, 1987). Other areas where the community could enjoy social services include:

- Use of the library and classroom for reading.
- Access to sporting facilities.
- Stage film shows concerts organized by student union.



- Volunteer work by the students union and students' association e.g. AIDS awareness campaign.
- Use of hall, mosques and churches for social functions.

In addition, staff and students interact with and live within their immediate community. Such interactions may be:

- Cordial/not cordial
- Friendly/unfriendly - Pleasant/ unpleasant

The incidences of attacks by cultist and robbery incidents being witnessed in tertiary institution are rather unfortunate. Efforts must be made by the larger students' body, the management of institution and the entire society to wipe out this sad phenomenon.

### **Exploring relationship for development**

The clamour for the higher education institutions to drop the toga to ivory tower and get themselves involved in the world of enterprise has been widely canvassed by scholars in the United Kingdom since the 1980s. Stephen Prickett (1983) in his article "Enterprise in Higher Education" however drew a note of caution. According to him, getting institutions involved in the market place could end up creating a chaotic system, which could lead to serious decline in education standard. In the United States of America where this exists, the result is a combination of the best and the worst education.

Notwithstanding the view expressed by Prickett, higher institutions should get themselves more involved and be pro-active in the economic development of the society. This they can do by using their vast repository of knowledge to impact positively on the economic development of their community rather than remaining as institutions for development of theories alone.

Most of the facilities in higher institutions are hardly made available for use by members of their immediate community. Access to facilities such as library and sporting facilities are more often than not restricted. Where these facilities are made accessible, very little information is available. There is therefore the need to make these facilities available to the community to promote cordial relationship.

Other measures that can be explored in promoting good, community-university relationship and good intra-community relationship include:

- Using university community relationship as a vehicle for egalitarianism.
- Establishing a forum for friends of the university.
- Organizing stakeholders' meeting.
- Formulating policy on grievances procedure.
- Keeping the cord of relationship alive at intra-community level.



- Protecting council's superintending authority from being eroded. -
- Students should not be alienated from decisions that affect them (sport committee, disciplinary committee, welfare committee, etc.).
- Joint programmes through university wide activities.
- Joint project for university - community (road, water, drainage, etc.).
- Public relations office.
- Industrial relations office/students union/human matters office.

### **Conclusion**

The promotion of cordial university community relationship is mutually beneficial for both the college and community. The institution has a lot to gain in terms of peace, stability and security by maintaining cordial relationship with its community. In the case of government owned institutions, they are accountable to the people they must provide value for taxpayers' money. The communities also have tremendous benefits in terms of economic gains, social and community services derivable from cordial interaction with universities. In the light of the changes in the global environment, universities must now explore pro-active participation in economic development so as to reduce dependence on government funding.

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