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Human and Institutional Capacity Building: Missing Link to Research and Development in Nigeria

Ejedafiru, Efe Francis

Department of Library and Information Science, Delta
State University, Abraka

Email: ejedafiruefe@yahoo.com

GSM - +2348030898698

Abstract

Capacity building is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and society develop their abilities individually or collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, set and achieve expected objectives. In this paper, the author reviewed the trend in human and institutional capacity building in Nigeria. The recent intense race by developing countries of the world, Nigeria being one of them, to establish themselves as significant players in the global economic and political arena call for the urgent need to build effective and efficient human and institutional capacity which will

create an enabling environment for research and development. However, the roles of the university in human and institutional development and the rationale for institutional capacity were also discussed. Conclusively, there was a reflection on the importance of sustained human and economic development that the university system provides and the need to foster quality in our institutions. Nigeria, therefore, Nigeria must march resolutely forward on this road since this is one of the pathways to achieving our goal of being one of the leading economies by 2020.

Key Words: Human, Institutional, Resources, Capacity, Research and Development

Introduction

Today, the world economy has accelerated its globalisation and all countries including Nigeria now face the challenge of adjusting to the new environment in order to benefit from the opportunities created. From all indications, Nigeria is among the least prepared country to face these new developments. This state of uneasiness could be traced to economic malaise, including low levels of development from the time of independence till date, poorly conceived policies, corruption and a hostile international economic environment.

On the human development side, Nigeria is continuously faced with problems of poor delivery strategies, poor practices and the problem of skills-gap. That is, Nigeria's graduates are not performing to expected capacity (Aluede, 2011). These could be evidenced in increase in unemployment due to the production of unproductive, unemployable and unskilled manpower, leading to insecurity in academics, politics, health and so on (Oghuvbu, 2013). However, world class manpower can be made possible only through world class university education system, characterised by the availability of world class physical infrastructure, world class institutional facilities and above all, world class human capacity to impart knowledge, conduct research, publish the outcome and administer/run the institute properly (Egwu, 2009).

The National Policy on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Education (2010) agrees with this much when it said that for Nigeria to attain sustainable development and enhance global competitiveness; it requires innovations, especially in the development of human capital.

The development of human capital for realizing the national vision needs to be furthered by a new set of knowledge, skills and attitude and the individual citizen needs to be fully equipped to be competitive as well as meet the challenges of the emergent environment (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Worse still, the most fundamental problems facing Nigeria in this 21st century are severe lack of capacity in humans and institutions. Despite some improvement in growth performance in some few African countries, Nigeria is still characterized by weak human and institutional capacity in formulating strategic projects and implementing strategic priorities and development programmes; in fact, the importance of capacity building for sustained economic development and transformation is now universally recognised as the missing link” in Africa development (Wangwe and Rweyemam, 2001). In the midst of all these, there is the problem of poor quality of prospective entrants into Nigerian tertiary institutions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009), therefore, focusing efforts on building capacity as a human race to meet the challenges of our time and to create a future that we all desire for, referred to as sustainable human development. Lu, Finley and McCormark (2009) postulated that this effort concentrates on investing in individuals as an enabling strategy toward creating sustainable future for human and the planet upon which we depend.

Capacity building is the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions, and societies develop their abilities individually and collectively to perform functions, solve problems set and achieve objective (UNDP, 1994). This definition has three implications:

- it implies that capacity is not a passive state but is part of a continuing process;
- it emphasises improved utilization and empowerment of individuals and organizations; and
- it requires that the overall social context be considered in devising capacity development strategies (Wangwe and Rwegeman, 2001).

In spite of all these, institutional and human capacity in Nigeria is not growing fast enough to keep up with the requirements of changing socio-economic circumstances. This could be traced to the weakening of public administration systems in general and civil service system in particular, a decline in the quality of systems of education in general and at the university levels in particular, declining investments in the social sector, brain drain, over dependence on oil and a weakening of the institutions of the civil society as a result of prolonged economic and political crises.

In Nigeria, capacity building is required in every sector. The degree and emphasis is determined by the level and complexity of existing human and institutional capabilities, the economic and financial means to support the capacity, the relative roles of the public and private sectors and the degree of civil society in the decision making process of the country.

Universities' Role in Human Resources Development

University education must be consciously informed by the orientations, virtues and intellectual dispositions nurtured at the foundation education levels. Every generation needs educational (and training) revolution different from what existed in the past, to meet the needs of the present, and the challenges of the future (Etta, 2006). Hence, the goals of tertiary education according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), include developing the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment, as well as making it possible for recipients to

acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable them to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. The emphasis here is the need to develop our local content and thereafter project it to the outside world. The researcher agreed with Arohunmolase (1998) who opined that we can use the linguistic, historical and the cultural evidences in Nigerian languages for our desired national development and unity.

It is not unexpected that if our graduates suffer recognition problems within and outside Nigeria, then the universities that graduated them would also suffer recognition in world rankings. The reasons for the poor performance of Nigerian universities are political, socio-economic and environmental factors, including centuries of colonialism; decades of military rule, corruption and lack of transparency in governance, unsustainable use of natural resources, marginal participation in the global economy and serious shortcomings in science and technology (Nwagwu, 2005).

As we look into the future, we lament the lost years where Nigeria missed out in the cycle of growth while other countries invested in university education which automatically means investment on human capacity. Nigeria has failed to measure up to expectation; these could be traced to poor funding, brain drain, incessant strikes by Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Universities (ASUU) and other related bodies within the universities. This state of uneasiness has affected the calibre of graduates produced by Nigeria universities. It is evidenced that undergraduates in Nigeria Universities photocopy material from 1960 textbooks. These would be modern graduates all armed with 1960 theories ready to take the world by storm and compete with the international community. Eghwu (2009) postulated that in our quest for the realization of our Vision 20-2020, we do recognize that our capacity to emerge within the club of twenty largest economies by 2020 as envisaged by our collective resolve will depend on the extent to which our human capacity is developed and transformed to compete globally. One may be forced to ask if we need a 20 years National Education roadmap to fix it. No, we need a purposeful

educational plan. Education, Education, Education: these were Blair`s vision for Britain.

The thrust of the matter is that Nigeria universities should watch out for changes and demands of labour market so that they could rethink, repackage, reposition and re-engineer their missions, in order to measure up with knowledge driven society. Therefore, Nigeria universities must strive to produce world class manpower which can only be made possible through sound educational policies and planning. Alani and Isola (2009) observes that investments in formal education, health facilities and services, on-the-job training, adult education and migration improve the capabilities of human beings and are therefore avenues for promoting human capital development. Besides, Nigeria`s human capital constitutes its most formidable asset and resources in it strive toward sustainable development in all its facets. Countries such as Singapore have excelled both economically and socially as a result of heavy and sustained investment in their human resources despite a limited natural resource endowment.

Human resource capacity development relates to the provision of a trained work force, to the promotion of knowledge and skills that are required by a society to acquire greater prosperity through the building of productive capabilities (Saasam 2004). For Nigeria and indeed our continent to take its rightful place in the history of humanity ... we need to undertake with a degree of urgency, a process of reclamation and assertion. We must context the colonial denial of our history and we must initiate our own conversations and dialogues about our past. We need our own historians and our own scholars to interpret history of our continent (President Thabo Mbeki- launching the South Africa Mali Timbuktu Library Project).

Need for Institutional Capacity Building

In Nigeria, minimum standards for institutional accreditation have been developed around the following:

- Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals

- Institutional governance and administration
- Institutional resources including learning resources and student support
- Quality of teaching and research
- Management of human and material resources and institutional efficiency and effectiveness
- Extension, relationships with internal and external constituencies and consultancy
- Financial management and stability
- General ethos (Okebukola, 2010).

A cursory look at these standards indicates that the objective is to upgrade facilities in these institutions in order to promote core activities of teaching, learning, research in critical areas for the benefits of institutions in Nigeria. Therefore, the onus now lies on universities' ability to discover and cherish their intellectual and human uniqueness through research, do everything possible to preserve them for the future generation and from there engage with other world knowledge systems, without inferiority complex.

Presently, scholarship in universities is characterized and constrained by the publication of research findings, though this system is fast getting competitive as a result of new information technologies (Odlyzko, 2000). The resulting confusion is posing a problem to Nigerian universities. Traditional scholarly publication through established journals characterized by peer review is being challenged by less formal net-based communication that links scholars essentially instantaneously. The contention is that universities need to preserve the benefits of the old system, in which the review process provides cohesion to a given field, while taking advantage of the speed and ease of access promised by the new media.

Meanwhile, as the forms of learning, teaching, research and preserving knowledge are being reshaped by rapid evolving information technology, so too will the universities' faculties, administration, management, governance, and relationships between students, faculty and staff require serious reevaluation and almost-certain change. Ironically, Nigeria is experiencing severe shortage of ICT skills and personnel necessary for taking advantage of new and emerging technologies in the knowledge society (Federal Ministry Education, 2009). This is further compounded by a weak ICT backbone in the country, poor and expensive bandwidth provision as well as poor obsolete infrastructure and services in the educational system.

Speaking on ICT interventions for the development of Nigeria universities, Okojie (2011) opined that:

as a quality assurance agency responsible for the development of university education in Nigeria, the NUC recognises the need to ensure that our educational institutions are at par with standards worldwide, to ensure that production of graduates and research developments that will be globally competitive. It is in this regard that NUC have been emphasising that technology should play a leading role in moulding our activities and those at the university.

If the above statement is something to go by, then universities must prioritize human and institutional capacity in vision and content for a noble posterity. Their mission should aim to discern and reinstate the viable intellectual lore, marked by conscience-ballasted knowledge inventions and practices that must be advanced for both home relevance and international viability. Toward this end, it is necessary for Nigeria to have well-funded and most-creative research institutions, to develop and attract the best technical and entrepreneurial talent among its own people as well as from around

the world, to make its economy among the most attractive for forming new ventures and growing small innovative firms, and to create the environment to ensure the deployment of the most advance technology infrastructure, applications and services here in Nigeria for the benefit of our people, institutions and firms.

Outcome of Link between Human and Institutional Capacity Development

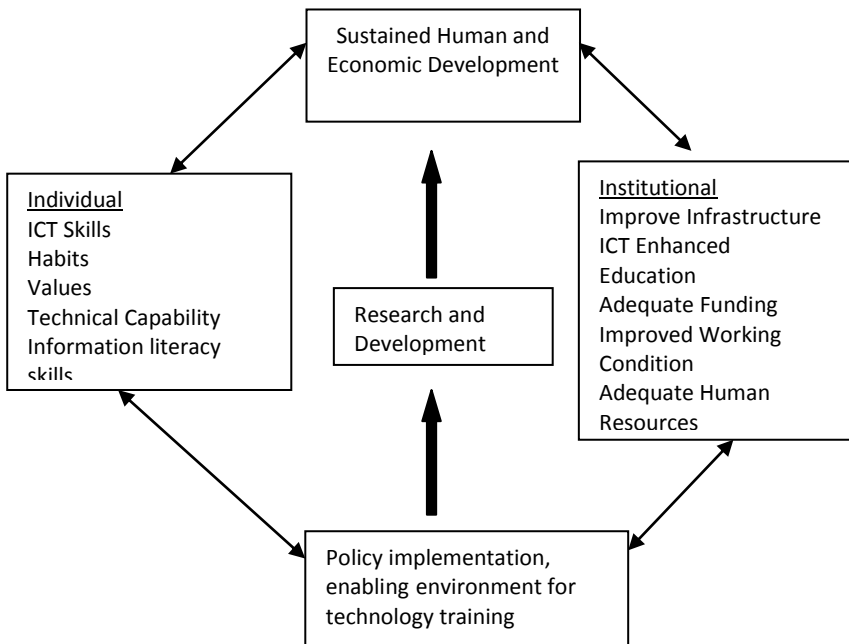


Figure 1: Link between human and institutional capacity development

This quest for improved quality has developed momentum over the last 50 years (Okebukola, 2010). He went further to observe that rising public demand for better performance of higher institutions, enrolment pressure, efficiency and accountability, demands, the need for better

quality graduates to drive the economy, dwindling public resources for higher education and the increasing cross-border provisions are some of the major drivers of this momentum. Human and institutional capacities are labels for the process of ensuring fitness of research and development. Hence, the National Universities Commission under the leadership of Professor Julius Okojie is expanding its quality assurance horizon to include institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation is a process where an institution is reviewed by a competent body or organisation for the purpose of establishing whether or not the institution meets a particular set of standards (Okebukola, 2010).

It evaluates the institution's capacity to produce a quality graduate that can stand the test of time. It also examines institutional features as governance, administrative strength, academic policies and procedures, quality of faculty, physical facilities and financial backing. The shift to knowledge-based economy requires that universities in Nigeria develop in individuals the ability to transform information into knowledge and to apply that knowledge in a dynamic, cross-cultural context (Ejedafiru and Akporhonor, 2011).

Conclusion

Though the importance of human and institutional capacity building for sustained human and economic development is now universally recognized, the record of achievement in Nigeria left much more to be desired. The framework for effective development of human and institutional capacity building is lacking. But given the low levels of capacity development and utilization in Nigeria, the need for a targeted strategic approach in this dispensation remains a high priority to all stakeholders. Effort therefore should be geared towards effective policy implementation and at the same time create an enabling environment for technology to thrive in our institutions of higher learning. Nigeria should realize that if its destiny is to attain sustained human and economic development for the entire societies, it must

develop the capacity to make and implement its own development choices.

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