

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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Let us give glory to the Almighty God who has brought us, all together this day for this very grand occasion. Without God we can do nothing. It is a pleasure that I have this opportunity to be here to discuss with this distinguished audience. I sincerely convey my gratitude to the Governing Council, the Senate, the Management, Staff and Students of this great institution that gave me this unique opportunity particularly to present this year's Convocation Lecture. I thank the Vice Chancellor, Professor Vincent Ado Tenebe who bears the flag for all of us in all matters in this institution. I thank all the invitees for their time and attention.

ABSTRACT

Let me start by saying that Nigeria is a country in democratic transition, constantly requiring measures that will keep its engine running as it progresses towards a developed society. As a young democracy, there are enormous challenges that it must necessarily face and its likelihood to surmount them not only rests on its ability to institute creative policies but also the willingness to faithfully implement them. The country's geographic size is huge and the population, massive. Education of this population is a critical factor in achieving its democratic transformation. Therefore, beyond

the conventional universities, a well-managed open and distance learning system can bridge education gap and impart necessary skills on learners irrespective of their location to facilitate the achievement of the development of their communities and the nation's overall development goals. A man's learning has no purpose if he does not put his education and expertise to the benefit of his people and to the benefit of humanity. Using the evaluative method, this paper examines open and distance learning implementation within the context of Nigerian democratic process.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact, shared by all that education is the foundation of civilization. Thus, for any country to develop and advance, education of the citizens constitutes a critical element. This is more in the emerging nations of Africa, Asia, Latin America and even the Middle East. This is even more so in Nigeria, a country with vast and rapidly growing population. For any meaningful and sustainable national development, education must be given a priority attention. Nigeria is in a phase where a fast-paced transformation process can be said to be the direct outcome of its years of unbroken democracy. The availability of manpower driving our growing economy has been as a result of the position enjoyed by education in the hearts of government and the people of the country. However, the size and population of Nigeria is such that the conventional system of education alone cannot meet its educational needs. Additionally, Nigeria's democratic environment has opened up limitless avenues for public education in all sectors of governance. The National Open University of Nigeria, since its

establishment has created a unique platform for the advancement of knowledge through a process which gives every Nigerian, especially those who wish to the opportunity for academic advancement and self-improvement. This paper, therefore, advances the view that open and distance learning can enhance Nigeria's democratic transformation if properly contextualized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Open and Distance Learning

Permit me at this stage to comment briefly, on the conceptual framework for open and distance learning and democratic transformation. To put this paper in perspective, we need to understand what is open and distance learning. For the purposes of this presentation, I shall use the term open and distance learning interchangeably with open and distance education. The elementary explanation of "open" is to give access to; make accessible or available as for use of; to render accessible to knowledge and enlightenment. Thus, open learning describes measures that encourage widespread access and participation in education (Collins, 2008). Field (1994) who views it as both an educational philosophy and a set of techniques for delivering knowledge and skills writes that:

As a philosophy, open learning implies greater accessibility, flexibility and student centeredness: it implies placing the learner rather than the provider at the core of educational practice. As a set of techniques, it is characterized by the use of resource-based

teaching and training, often associated with the use of new communications media.

As an educational method, open learning targets removal of traditional barriers to formal education be it age, location, poverty, gender, status, race, work, and so on. In essence, open learning is meant to open the doors of education to people for whom the doors of formal learning was formally closed. It is an educational practice which supports “the production, use and reuse of high quality open educational resources through institutional policies, which promote innovative pedagogical models, and respect and empower learners as co-producers on their lifelong learning path” (ICDE, 2010). This definition again, emphasises the participatory nature of open education where learners together with their teachers are involved in the production and consumption of knowledge. Perhaps, nothing captures the meaning of the openness in open learning than Lord Crowther’s 1969 explication of the nature of ‘openness’ of the then new Open University of the United Kingdom (OUUK), which entails, “open as to people ... places ... methods ... and ideas” (Daniel, 1998).

Distance, on the other hand depicts separation in space or/and time. Distance education is then systematized learning activities in which teachers and learners operate from different location and time. It is argued that the attraction which distance education holds and will continue to hold is its delivery of the promise of providing learning irrespective of time and place. This advantage is at once clear to a learner engaged in work to

whom “distance education provides the opportunity to participate in advanced academic study while remaining fully engaged in work and family.” (Caspers and Ragan, 2000).

Wedemeyer, reputed to be the creator of distance education and open learning, identified independence as the defining element of distance education. Thus, he holds that, “independent study consists of various forms of teaching–learning arrangements in which teachers and learners carry out their essential tasks and responsibilities apart from one another, communicating in a variety of ways”(Wedemeyer, 1977). These variety of ways that enhance communication include post, telephone, electronic communication, printed study materials, television or computer (Collins, 2008).

Prior to the late 20th century, the two terms, “open education” and “distance education” were used separately. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) traces the combination of “open” and “distance” in open and distance learning and holds that it is relatively new in the field of education, having gained prominence only in the past 15 to 20 years. It observes that the language and the terms used to describe open and distance learning activities can still be confusing. This is because experts lay varying focus on separation of teacher and student, institutional accreditation, mixed-media courseware, possibility of face-to-face meeting for tutorials, two-way communication, and use of industrialized processes. COL also presents the following as among the commonly used terms

related to open and distance learning: correspondence education, home study, independent study, external study, continuing education, distance teaching, self-instruction, adult education, technology-based or mediated education, learner-centered education, open learning, open access, flexible learning and distributed learning.

As a concept, open and distance learning is learning that enhances access to educational opportunities for those who ordinarily lack access to it. Based on this description, Dhanarajan (2001) holds that the marginalized group and people in remote areas remain the target of open and distance learning.

The Commonwealth of learning provides the following characteristics for open and distance learning:

- Firstly, Separation of the teacher and the learner in time or place. It involves institutional accreditation; that is, learning is accredited or certified by some institutions or agencies. This type of learning is distinct from private learning without the official recognition of learning institution.
- Secondly, the process makes use of multi-media approach, including print, radio and television broadcasts, video and audio cassettes, computer-based learning and telecommunications. Courseware tends to be pretested and validated before use.

- Thirdly, it creates a two-way communication which permits learners and tutors to interact as distinct from the passive receipt of broadcast signal. Communication can be synchronous or asynchronous. There is also a possibility of face-to face meetings for tutorials, learner to learner interaction, library study and laboratory or practice sessions.
- And fourthly, it includes the use of industrialized processes; that is, large scale open and distance learning operations, labour is divided and tasks are assigned to various staff who work together in course development teams.

Open and distance learning offers a number of advantages to learners and the education authorities such as overcoming physical distance for learners at remote locations who do not want to attend campus; and solve time or scheduling problems for those who cannot come together in one setting. It also expands the limited number of places available by creating alternatives for campus-based institutions, accommodates low or dispersed enrollment and makes best use of the limited number of teachers available.

Open and distance education in Nigeria

Historically, the phenomenon known now as open and distance learning took off around the 1880s as an innovative approach to allow educators reach those with whom they were unable to interact "face to face due to

various circumstances” (Enuku and Ojogwu 2006). The earliest resort to correspondence studies in Nigeria was to allow those Nigerians who could not afford to travel abroad for further studies prior to the establishment of the University College, Ibadan (Omolewa, 1981). We can recall the days of Rapid Result College of London and Exam Success Correspondence College of West Africa, based in Yaba, Lagos. All of these delivered lessons and tutorials through correspondence in Ordinary and Advance Level courses and the Rapid Result College offered even technical education through correspondence. A lot of people who became acclaimed academics, educationists, technologists, administrators and specialists in many fields got their Cambridge certificates, Advance Level papers and Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education (GCE) papers through correspondence Education, the forerunner of today’s open and distance learning.

It is pertinent to note that our first generation Universities took a clue from these correspondence colleges and established distance learning programmes, to serve the same purpose from a home based background. The provision of Open and Distance Learning by Nigerian educational institutions can be traced to the 1960s following the establishment of the Teacher In-service Education Programme (TISEP) by the Ahmadu Bello University, Kano in 1967. This was closely followed, in 1973, by the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU), of the University of Lagos. The inauguration of the Universal Primary Education in 1976 revealed serious inadequacy on the number and quality of Nigerian teachers. This necessitated the establishment of the National Training Institute (NTI) with

headquarters in Kaduna for the in service training and certification of teachers through distance education. Perhaps, the biggest boost to ODL in Nigeria was the incorporation of life-long learning as the basis of the 1977 Nigerian National Policy on Education.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education states that at any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study or embarking on full time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later.

According to the policy document, the goals of open and distance education are to:

- Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula.
- Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work (NPE, 2004).

Enuku and Ojogwu (2006) writes that the national policy on education anticipated the establishment of single mode institutions that would offer ODL to Nigerians. The Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) established in 1983, suspended in 1984 in full disregard of the provisions of the National Policy on Education, and reopened in 2002 as National Open University of Nigeria was considered by Enuku and Ojogwu (2006) as direct consequence of the 1977 national policy on education. Let us recall that successive governments in Nigeria even in the days of military rule have pursued programmes in mass literacy to enhance public education and mass participation in government. For instance, the mass literacy programmes of the 80s were pilot programmes to facilitate open and distance learning. At the institutional level, both federal and state-owned universities established satellite campuses that offered Distance Education to learners separated by space from the main campuses of the universities. Abuse by the parent institutions necessitated the closure, in 2001, of the satellite campuses by the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Okebukola, 2013). Besides the National Open University of Nigeria with single focus on ODL, there are six conventional universities certified by the NUC to also offer ODL programmes. These are University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Abuja, University of Maiduguri, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Federal University of Technology, Yola. The *raison d'être* for the establishment of ODL institutions vary from country to country. Zahang (2005) holds that widening access to education for non-traditional learners and expansion of a country's knowledge economy influence the establishment of ODL institutions in developed

countries. There is also the argument that students' preference for technology-mediated learning that offers them control of their own time is a contributory factor in the establishment of ODL institutions in developed countries (Latchem 2012). However, different type of factors accounts for establishment of ODL institutions in developing nations. Malik et al (2005) lists four compelling reasons that give rise to ODL in developing countries. They include: "(1) the need to widen access to higher education for the masses; (2) the need to provide continuing formal and informal education; (3) the need to train increasing numbers of students in provincial areas that are target zones for socio-economic development within a country; and (4) the need to upgrade primary and secondary school teachers' qualifications." Another compelling reason is lack of viable resources for expansion of education in the face of poverty that bedevils most developing countries (Latchem 2012). Being a developing nation, all the factors listed above by Malik et al and Latchem apply to Nigeria and were therefore responsible for the establishment of ODL institutions in the country.

Countries operate open and distance learning because of the recognition of the role it can play in their development. Their contents are structured to advance the development needs of the countries. Open and distance learning make contributions in terms of the number of graduates that it produces and injects into society. These graduates assist society in realizing its developmental goals. Many people who utilize open and distance education to gain qualifications do so while they are in full

employment. It means that they study while at the same time contributing to the socio-economic improvement of their country through paying income taxes, paying for their kids' education and being important members of society by participating in developmental activities of their communities. Thus, open and distance learning is a way of learning remotely without being in regular face-to face contact with your instructors and counselors. Nigeria has logically followed up the development of this system with the establishment of National Open University of Nigeria with multi campuses across the federation that provide learning, and educational facilities well above the proliferated campuses of part time programmes which became fashionable in our tertiary institutions some time ago.

Notwithstanding the advantages which ODL holds for a country, it is not impervious to the challenges that confront conventional education. The challenges of providing conventional education are well-documented and even developed nations still battle to surmount them. The peculiarity of ODL entails that on top of all the challenges which it shares with conventional learning, it has a number of daunting challenges that are specific to it. These challenges relate to what Collins (2008) regards as its demand for time, effort, energy, skills, knowledge and staff resources. There are also challenges that relate to public acceptability of ODL as a mode of study whose outcomes are comparable to conventional mode of study. This question of acceptability influences the existence of a state of affairs which Adams (1997) views as the marginalization of ODL courses in UK universities, of course with understandable exception of Open

University of UK. This state of affairs also exist in Nigeria where graduates of National Open University of Nigeria are still excluded from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and the Law School on the erroneous understanding by the authorities of these institutions that NOUN's programmes are part-time programmes.

Democracy and Transformation

As ordinary persons, we may bask in the euphoria that we know and understand the meaning of the term democracy. Despite our presumed assuredness, political scientists and philosophers are in continuous contention of the meaning of democracy. One of the definitions of democracy is that given by Iris Marion Young. She sees democracy as "a condition of social justice...and a condition of freedom in the sense of self determination." In an attempt to clarify Young's definition, Omazu(2010) writes that:

Democracy seen as condition of justice and freedom incorporates the three elements—self determination, participation and impartial standard of distribution—in the understanding of freedom and ... justice. Here democracy is understood as a framework that eradicates all institutionalized structures of inhibition that hinder individual self determination, active participation in decision making and flawed standard of distribution. This entails that democracy as

a form of government tends to trim away all those obstructions that make one absent in the arena where decisions concerning him are taken, and where his duties and rights are assigned. The reason behind such ideal is that the presence of such a person will in no small amount secure all his interests.

Let me not bore you further with the scientific and philosophical encumbrances involved in the definition of democracy. We shall leave that for the experts. For the purpose of this lecture, we shall view democracy as a system of government in which citizens of a country rule by majority vote. According to Miguel and Martinez-Dordella (2014) democracy is “a political system in which there are frequent, free and fair general elections between diverse political parties competing for power, as well as protection of the rights of minorities, respect for human rights, equality under the law and political pluralism. ” It is a political system that the United Nations calls a “universally recognized ideal”. This is based on the idea that democracy benefits people by protecting basic human rights.

Scheffler (1987) describes the democratic ideal as “that of an open and dynamic society: open, in that there is no antecedent social blueprint which is itself to be taken as a dogma immune to critical evaluation in the public forum; dynamic, in that its fundamental institutions are not designed to arrest change but to order and channel it by exposing it to public scrutiny and resting it ultimately upon the choices of its members. The emphasis

here is on the role of free speech, public discourse, different opinions, media play in shaping democracy.

Besides this view of democracy, there are also what may be regarded as negative views or misconceptions of democracy. Warning about these false perceptions of democracy, Joseph Leighton draws attention to Steyn et al, (1999) who hold that: "democracy consists in the abolition of all distinctions: that its main aim is to level all to the same standard, to make us all as two peas in a pod. This means inevitable leveling down in the place of leveling up. It means the rule of the dead level of mediocre uniformity. It means – the tyranny of the crowd mind." Another misconception is that democracy is only about rights, without any consideration being given to responsibility and accountability.

Democracy properly understood guarantees protection from abuse of power under a system where no branch of government is able to obtain more power than the other two because such is legally restricted with a series of checks and balances. Critics argue that the operators of government in both the legislature and the executive are conniving to wither checks and balances and the advantages of separation of power as the two arms of government are known to fuse their interests together to the detriment of the national interest. In a powerful article written by Alesina and Rosenthal (1996), it is shown that enlightened voters in the highly developed democracy of the United States of America have devised ways of foreclosing collusion of the executive and the legislature. They do

this by engaging in what is regarded as “split-tickets where some voters vote for one party for president and the other for congress”. The aim is to ensure “a divided government with different parties controlling the executive and the majority of the legislature,” and thereby ensure a reasonable balance of power. The balance of power helps to ensure that the will of the country’s citizens is enforced rather than the will of the small group of political leaders.

Freedom of association, speech, voting and media access is all protected by democracy. Speech and uncensored media access are critical to the dissemination of new ideas and the process of consensus-building through debate. Democracy is the capacity of all voters to participate freely and fully in the life of their society. With its emphasis on notions of social contract and collective will of all the voters, democracy can also be characterized as a form of political collectivism because it is defined as a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in lawmaking (Wikipedia, Democracy).

Transformation, on the other hand is the act or process of transforming, the state of being transformed. In an organizational or national context, it is a process of profound and radical change that orients an organization or country in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. Unlike “turnaround” (which implies incremental progress on the same plane), transformation implies a basic change of character and little or no resemblance with the past configuration or structure.

“Transformation is a strong word that portends a radical, structural and fundamental reappraisal of the basic assumptions that underlie our reforms and developmental efforts” (Osisioma, 2012).

Transformation or national development of the right kind involves the following;

- Growth in the productive capacity of society: growth in productivity of labour, agriculture and capital (leading to growth in capita incomes and per capita assets).
- Development that leads to significant and continuing improvement in the quality of life for the poor and the near-poor (that is the majority of the population in most developing societies).
- Development that serves to broaden the distribution of economic assets and incomes.
- Development that leads to improvement in conditions of health and safety in the workplace.
- Development that leads to improvement in “quality of life” issues for all: improved access to health care, clean water, and education.
- Development that leads to sustainable environmental change and resources use.
- Development that leads to improvement in gender equity over time.

Based on the foregoing, we view democratic transformation as a change in the structure of society as midwifed by democracy. We do not argue that

democracy alone engenders transformation as even non-democratic governments in some parts of Asia have been shown to be agents of social transformation. Our argument is that democracy engenders transformation of a certain kind that not only targets all sectors of a society but also involves all members of society. In essence, it is an all inclusive, all embracing transformation.

Despite our submission above, there are arguments as to whether democracy is the best form of government, whether indeed, it is the best platform for economic development and for nations and citizens to realize their potentials. The debate about democracy and transformation, democratization and national development has been extensive. Events from around the world are presenting what may be regarded as confusing picture. The present world reality where some of the most consolidated democracies like Spain, Greece and Portugal are experiencing declining economic growth has pushed some people to wonder whether democratic institutions can facilitate transformation or national development (Cf Miguel and Martinez-Dordella, 2014). Some look at the experiences of Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia and argue that authoritarian regimes are better able to engender transformation than democracy. For this school of thought, democratic governments are generally less capable of managing and effecting economic development than authoritarian regimes. Despite its shortcomings, Tony Judt (2012) writes that democracy deserves our defence as it is: " the best short-term defence against undemocratic alternatives, but it is not a defence against its own genetic shortcomings."

According to Judt, the real task involved in this defence both physically and intellectually is not to imagine better worlds, but to prevent worse ones from occurring.

Our topic, **Open and Distance Learning and Democratic Transformation in Nigeria** stands on some established facts; first, that Nigeria is a democracy. Second that democratic transformation is going on in Nigeria, and lastly that open and distance learning as a system of education can complement the ongoing democratic transformation. These are the basic premises on which we stand to discuss.

NIGERIA AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION

Let me quickly reaffirm that Nigeria is going through a democratic transformation. To arrive at this point where we now speak of democratic transformation was not an easy journey. Thus, apart from the period 1960-1966, 1979-1983 and the current democratic dispensation starting from 1999, the country had largely been under various military regimes, coming in through one coup d'état or the other. One of them triggered the very costly civil war of 1967-1970.

After the first wave of military coups and the military was finally forced to retreat to its barracks in 1979, the second attempt at democratization failed as the military under Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari took over once

again in 1983 and instituted what some critics regard as “government of national salvation.” (Cf Miguel and Martinez-Dordella, 2014). This government of national salvation failed to save itself as it caved in to a palace coup that brought General Ibrahim Babangida to power. He initiated a firmly guided economic reform and democratization programme which lasted for eight years. At the end of this programme in mid-1993, Nigeria experienced what was then regarded as the best organized and the freest and fairest elections in its history. The nationally known business tycoon, Moshood Abiola, from the South emerged as the clear victor.

It became apparent later that the military government which superintended the election, did not consider Abiola worthy of ruling Nigeria and massive resistance from within military and civil service ranks forced the junta head, Babangida, to annul the elections and step down after he had installed an interim regime under Ernest Shonekan. Shonekan’s administration was short-lived. Babangida had left Gen. Sani Abacha in what some critics thought was a deliberate design to get him to power through the back door, once there was a slip by Shonekan. Indeed, after a few weeks, Abacha led the military back to power through another coup in November 1993 and until his sudden death in 1998. Abacha’s tight grip on power was defective as he silenced the civil society, clamping jail terms on anyone who dared criticize his government. His efforts at democratization were, at best, considered insincere in many quarters as all the existing five political powers unanimously adopted him as their flag bearer in the presidential election which his military rule proposed. At the time of Abacha’s death in

June, 1998, it was clear that military rule has completely lost all claims to legitimacy. General Abdulsalami Abubakar who took over following Abacha's death cleared the way for elections and the transfer of power to an elected President. He also released all political prisoners including General Olusegun Obasanjo. Abiola died shortly before his scheduled release.

General Abubakar stayed less than a year in the saddle, and the now Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who had been the head of junta from 1976 to 1979, took office as President after a clear election victory in 1999. Understandably, the 1999 elections were fraught with shortcomings and logistical problems including fraud, violence and open ballot rigging. These shortcomings, so to say, did not affect the election results in Obasanjo's favour. He won a clear majority in almost every region of the country and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) won absolute majorities in both chambers of the national parliament. He was re-elected in 2003, and the PDP also confirmed its dominance of the national parliament and majority of the states.

President Obasanjo handed over the reins of government to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua on May 29, 2007 after the former governor of Katsina State emerged winner of the April 21, 2007 presidential election after winning about 70% of the total votes cast. The controversy and accusations of irregularity surrounding the outcome of the election caused President Yar'Adua to propose a government of national unity. Consequently, two opposition parties, the All Nigerian People's Party

(ANPP) and the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) agreed to join his administration.

Yar'Adua left the country for Saudi Arabia on November 23, 2009 to receive treatment for pericarditis and was not seen again in public. He did not hand over to the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and the Senate had to apply the controversial "doctrine of necessity" to transfer executive powers to the Vice President. Even when Yar'Adua was brought back to the country, some say under the cover of darkness on 24 February, 2010, his state of health was unclear as speculation continued that he was on life support machine. He died on 5th of May, 2010 at the Presidential Villa and the then acting President Jonathan was sworn in as substantive president on the 6th May, 2010 in line with the constitution of the country.

A national election was due in 2011 and the now incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan contested. Jonathan won the April 2011 presidential election and launched a series of initiatives most notably the Transformation Agenda based on a summary of how the Federal Government hopes to deliver projects, programmes and key priority policies from 2011 to 2015.

To understand the background to the Transformation Agenda, we should recall the global and democratic conditions preceding this administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan which took office on 6th May, 2010. Before that date, the years 2007, 2008 to 2009 were the years of global economic recession. In the world over, oil prices fall, manufacturing declined, unemployment soared, banks were in distress and not a few

large companies worked out mergers while others completely closed their shops. Regional economic and political blocs had to collaborate to work out national contingency plans for rehabilitation and recovery from the recession.

Let us remember that within the same period in Nigeria, many banks could not cope and a number of financial institutions folded up when the Apex bank, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) put forward recovery measures that called for recapitalization of capital base for stability. The nation had to work out withdrawal of subsidies on petroleum products and some programmes on short term relief were put in place at the national and state levels. All these were the consequences of the global economic crises which Nigeria also experienced through the sharp reduction of the volume and value of oil export and our gross national income. There was sharp decline of remittance from Nigerians abroad, continuous decline in the Naira to Dollar exchange rate and almost a total halt in foreign and local investments due to uncertainties. As the world struggled into 2010, regional economic blocs and indeed individual countries had to put recovery programmes in place. It is at this point that the Jonathan–Sambo administration took over the ship of state effectively; and so they came in with a vision of transforming Nigeria, economically, socially and politically—hence the origin of our 15 point National Transformation Agenda.

Assessing the state of his Transformation Agenda, the President in his words holds that his administration is striving:

... to achieve significant improvements in the living conditions of all Nigerians through the diligent implementation of our Agenda for national Transformation.

In the past four year, we have dedicated our full energies and all available resources to national renaissance, rejuvenation, growth and progress in several areas including national infrastructure, social services, power supply, education, healthcare delivery, agriculture, transportation, aviation, rail services and electoral reform.

We have, in keeping with our commitment to national transformation, evolved and begun the implementation of several innovative policies and programmes aimed at achieving faster and more sustainable socio-economic growth in all parts of Nigeria.

In areas where we have found them necessary, my administration has boldly undertaken essential reforms to keep our ship of state on an even keel and foster a more conducive environment for inclusive economic growth and development.

The agenda for National transformation and other reforms of our administration are being implemented in tandem with the strengthening, carrying forward and completion of laudable programmes, policies and projects initiated by previous administrations in consonance with our belief in the continuity of government for the good of the nation. (Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Transforming Nigeria, 2014)

We have seen the origin, the spirit and the vision of the democratic transformation going on in Nigeria. Let me call our attention to the point that this transformation is democratic. That is, stating that you and I are involved in the transformation if not directly, indirectly through the delegation of our authority to our representatives in the National Assembly and the Federal Executive Council; the organs from where Mr. President derives his authority to execute the transformation.

Let us look at the policy visions and the underlying philosophies in the key sectors of the transformation agenda. I shall quote from the Handbook on Transforming Nigeria published by the office of the Secretary of the Government of the Federation (SFG).

Underlying Philosophy of Economic Management:

The economic management philosophy of President Jonathan is centred on creating an enabling environment for private sector led inclusive growth. The President believes technological innovation, healthy competition, fair taxation, protected intellectual and property rights, affordable financing, and facilitated domestic and international trade, which in turn would enable the private sector to be the main driver of inclusive economic growth and job creation. This government believes that creating and sharing opportunities in the private sector would also require that the system protects and provides for the poor and vulnerable in society through the establishment of reliable, timely, and targeted social safety nets.

To this end, the administration's first steps were to begin to gradually reduce the footprints of government in business activities through privatization, liberalization and deregulation. In order to attract credible local and international private investors, the administration took bold steps to deregulate key sectors of the economy including agriculture, solid minerals, downstream

petroleum, power, communication technology, health, education, transportation, aviation, and housing.

Underlying philosophy for Infrastructure Reform

This president believes that infrastructure development, wealth creation, and long-term economic growth are mutually reinforcing. However, many experts believe that there is a huge infrastructure-funding gap in Nigeria and other sub-Sahara African countries. In view of these premises, the administration's underlying premises in infrastructure reforms is to close this gap by not only allocating as much funding from the budget as possible every single year, but also by aggressively attracting the private sector into investments in infrastructure project through public private partnership (PPP). The government also believes in seeking sources of alternative funding such as concessional credits in the country's medium-term borrowing plan.

In view of the high returns already recorded in infrastructure investments in the country, Nigeria's inadequate infrastructure is both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity for the private sector.

Underlying Philosophy for Human Capital Development

President Jonathan believes that no country can achieve the goods of inclusive economic growth, job creation, food, security, affordable and accessible healthcare, clean energy, zero hunger, and declining poverty without adequate and sustained investment in human capital development. To ensure that rapid economic growth translates into better lives for all Nigerian, the president believes that the government will need to invest significantly in education, health services, youth and women's development, sports, skill acquisition, along with other aspects of human capital.

These investments are not just good in their own right, but they also ensure that Nigeria would have a healthy and educated work force that can compete for global opportunities and guarantee a better life for the next generation. This is a debt the country's leadership owes to its people: to give them the means to live better and longer, and pursue more fulfilled lives.

Underlying Philosophy of Governance

A former Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) once defined Democratic Governance as a political socio-economic framework in which every individual and every community becomes an equal member of society and can shape the destiny of society. President Jonathan shares this description of governance and believes that engendering well-sequenced governance reforms would enshrine fairness in elections, transparency in governments, peace in civil society, confidence in the justice system, freedom in the media, stability in institutions, and integrity in political office holders.

This underlying philosophy explains Mr. President's emphasis on consultation and dialogue, process and procedure, clear and need-driven project conception, open and competitive procurement process, equitable distribution of social amenities, diligent planning and execution strategies, checks and balances, rule of law, and extensive expansion of civil space as well as respect for citizens' right.

Underlying Philosophy for Security and Safety

President Jonathan believes that one of the most critical functions of any government must be to secure the lives and property of the citizens. In this regard, the government's underlying principle is to deal decisively and strategically with insecurity while protecting the civic space that assures the right and safety of every citizen. While effectively combating violent attacks on the state, the government would also seize the opportunity to demonstrate how to protect civil liberties and, at the same time, defeat terrorism. Given that terrorism is not a Nigerian, but a global phenomenon, President Jonathan believes in a coordinated and collaborative approach across countries, especially those afflicted by similar problem. Hence, the Nigerian government collaborates with its sub-regional and regional partners to address the possible spread of conflicts; the President is strongly inclined to find quick and consultative ways to manage political crises and conflicts in the continent, as was the case in Mali and Guinea Bissau. Nigeria will continue to be a leading voice in conflict resolution whenever and wherever it exists in the continent.

I have to quote so extensively from the handbook on Transforming Nigeria, a publication of the office of the SGF to enable us understand the vision and direction of our transformation. Out of the above major sectors of transformation outlay, I take shall only one to pinpoint the execution outlay, just to bring out some more details of how the executive arm of government, headed by President Goodluck Jonathan is steering the ship of transformation.

Under the Infrastructure Reforms there are subsectors and sectorial units for:

- a) Road Map for Power Sector Reform
- b) Presidential Action Committee on Power (PACP) and Presidential Task Force on Power (PTFP)
- c) Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission
- d) Cost Reflective Tariff Regime
- e) Establishment of Consumer Assistance Fund (CAF)
- f) Rural Electricity Agency (REA)
- g) Transmission Company of Nigeria
- h) Generation Companies (GenCos) and Distribution Companies (Discos)
- i) Operationalising NELMCO
- j) Grid-based Generation of Power
- k) Transmission
- l) Distribution
- m) Historic Power Generation

Under Railways we have the following;

- a) System Transmission
- b) System Modernization
- c) System Stabilization

Other sub-sectors with sectorial units under Infrastructure Reform include: Water and Sanitation, Aviation, Inland Waterways, Roads, Road Safety Management, Ports and Harbours Reforms, Communication Technology, and National Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan etc.

Just see with me one major sector sub-sectorial outlays and break down of units in the Transformation Agenda. So imagine the totality of sectors and sub-sectorial units covering the whole National Transformation Agenda and you will appreciate the enormous work involved in turning the country around. Let me note here that in all these areas, this administration has opened up the entire economy and administration to Nigerians herein engaged to be involved with their presence, their learning, their education and put all to work to enhance our National Transformation. Is this effort and direction not thoughtful and democratic? We have dwelt so long and to some details on the Transformation Agenda to establish the fact that democratic transformation is going on in all sectors of our national life.

THE ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ENHANCING NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

At this juncture, let us turn to Open and Distance Learning to see how we can use this system of education; not just for our personal gains and individual expertise but also to support the National Transformation Agenda through democratic avenues. Education makes a man easy to govern but impossible to enslave. This is on the premise that education brings out from each citizen, a better understanding, appreciation and participation in the affairs of government; while ignorance leaves one in suspicion and disinterest even in fear and opposition to the affairs of government. This points to the propriety of education for the mass of the citizens if not for all. Formal and institutionalized education is one avenue while informal and incidental avenues also abound.

Thus, education enables the citizens to monitor and follow the programmes of their government. The next point is a question; are we following the transformation? To follow is to understand, to appreciate and to contribute to the agenda hence; democracy is a government of the people by the people, for themselves.

I employ Nigerians to understand the philosophy of the Transformation Agenda, sector by sector in order to appreciate and contribute to the national transformation. How can we contribute to or even criticize a system or programme which we do not understand? This administration is executing the transformation on well-thought out underlying philosophies

in each sector of national development. These policies cover the key sectors of Economic Management, Infrastructure Reforms, Human Capital Development, Good Governance and the very important Security Sector.

In what follows, we shall expose the various areas where open and distance help in enhancing national transformation. They include the following;

Agent of technological innovation

One of the fulcrum upon which the hope of achieving transformation in the economic sector rests is technological innovation. Achieving technological innovation demands a well-thought out and highly organized synergy between the industry and the university, the town and the gown. However, the structure and tradition of the conventional universities do not permit simultaneous participation in the lives of the industry and the university. This entails that the general workforce expected to be the engine of this technological innovation-driven economy lack both the time and resources to acquire further training on technological developments. You must also agree with me that majority of Nigeria's workforce today who are above the age of forty lack basic knowledge in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). They remain analogue even while the world is on high speed on the digital lane.

This is where the open and distance learning institutions come in. As system offering a flexibility in terms of choice of course, time and place of

study, as well as method of study, the open and distance education affords willing technology savvy individuals the opportunity to upgrade their knowledge and keep abreast of the fast-paced world of technology while contributing to the progress and growth of their family and the nation at large. Through its ability to provide on-the job training and certification, it ensures that the workforce that pilots our economy are technologically up to date.

Economic growth

Open and Distance Learning is an avenue for many people to become learned and be better workers in any profession they chose or are currently engaged in. Students are allowed to read up to whatever level they want, hence contributing to the economic growth of the nation through better performance. Okebukola (2013) supports this view and holds that:

More than half of the members of the league of the world's top 15 economies which in spite of the thin dose of natural resources boosted their economic power through harnessing the power of education. Japan and Korea present examples.... As everyday experiences have shown, the better barber, farmer, restaurant operator or the driver is one that is educated. Armed with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values developed through education, the individual that joins the nation's workforce is able to foster economic growth.

For employers, open and distance learning offers the possibility of organizing in-service training for their staff without necessarily releasing them for long periods of productive time with sufficient number of employees being trained. Open and distance learning is often the most cost-effective means. For government and educational policy makers, the system is a panacea for the perennial problem of provision of equitable and accessible education in an affordable and cost-effective way. The government too incurs little cost on the training but develops the manpower to improve the economic situation of the nation. Nigerian prisoners or inmates enjoy distance learning programmes in Nigeria so as to be useful to the nation by contributing their quota to the development and economy of the nation during their incarceration and after their release. In essence, open and distance learning is an instrument for the development of life skills of a nation's citizenry for the management of the available natural resources.

Contribution to human capital development

As shown earlier, President Goodluck Jonathan's transformation agenda believes that achieving "the goods of inclusive economic growth, job creation, food, security, affordable and accessible healthcare, clean energy, zero hunger, and declining poverty" rests on "adequate and sustained investment in human capital development." Thus, the hope of making Nigeria one of the most developed economies of the world which is the target of the Transformation Agenda lies in massive education of the

masses. As presently constituted, the conventional universities lack the capacity to develop the abundant human capitals that abound in Nigeria.

Table 1: Application and Admission of Candidates in Nigerian Universities 2003/2004 – 2007/2008

	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008
Application	1,046,940	838,051	917,960	912,350	1,034,083
Admission	107, 860	122, 496	76, 984	118,056	47,476
Un-admitted	939, 080	715,555	840,976	794,294	986,607

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2009.

Constrained by space, the conventional institutions yearly turn back hundreds of thousands of citizens who seek admission in them. The open and distance learning institutions offer a ready and unquantifiable alternative by ensuring that neither space nor other excluding barriers can shut out a willing citizen from university education.

Thus, open and distance learning is expected to provide essential knowledge, skills, and competencies to individuals for effective participation in society and economy, and expansion of scientific and cultural knowledge (OECD 2006). It is also agreed that another specific important benefit of ODL in national transformation relate to its propensity to equip learners with the capabilities to adapt to emerging technology and environments

(Chimpololo 2010); mitigation of barriers that are hindrances to traditional education (Tight 2004); provision of flexible opportunities (in terms of time, mode, space, requirements, and so on) to learners (Collins 2008). Furthermore, inasmuch as ODL involves individualized learning strategies, it can also be said to offer greater opportunities for self-development and self-dependence. In their study of contribution of ODL to Nigerian development, Aderinoye and Ojokheta, (2004) hold that ODL has positive influence on individual development of citizens, teacher training, social transformation, community development, AIDs education and farming.

Sustenance of democratic governance

I leave you to wonder why no military government in Nigeria considered it fit to establish an Open University for Nigeria even when it was clear that it was an emerging trend among leading nations of the world, and more so since we regard ourselves as giant of Africa. While the National Teachers' Institute can be said to be an act of the military, it is clear that its target is limited as it was meant to provide professional training and certification for teachers. The more the military stayed in power, the more they understood the role of the critical mass in promoting and sustaining democracy, this explains why majority of the institutions created by the military were specialized institutions offering training and certification mainly in technology and agriculture. There was no provision for the Liberal Arts and the Social Sciences, the undisputed engines of democracy and civil society. Thus, as much as was possible, the military undertook a controlled production of the critical mass by ensuring that an open university, with its

capacity to provide limitless access to university education was denied Nigerians. Even when a democratically elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari established an open university, shutting it down was one of the first acts undertaken by the military government that succeeded him in the very first year of its life. It took another civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo that emerged fifteen years down the line to resuscitate the National Open University.

The truth is that any country that wants to democratize, and that wants to consolidate its democracy, the route to take is massification of education for its citizens. Global realities have shown that political parties, periodic elections, the presence of three arms of governments do not sustain democracy and strengthen democratic values. What does is the expansion of higher education. (Cf Miguel and Martinez-Dordella, 2014). As it stands today, the National Open University of Nigeria alone has the capacity to massify education for the teeming Nigerian populace.

A highly educated population has the capacity not only to participate directly in governance but also to ask questions about how it is being governed. Such a population is conscious of its civil liberties, insist on the existence of free press where one can freely air their opinions no matter how repugnant they may sound to others. In a population of limited education, it may be possible for a dictator to silence the few voices but in a highly educated democracy silencing a critical voice may entail

exterminating all the citizens excepting the ruler. No sane leader will like to toe this path, even an insane one will lack the capacity for it.

Social enhancement

Open and distance learning schemes hold a number of potential benefits for various stakeholders in the education and development process. To the learners, open and distance learning means more freedom of access as well as a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualifications, thereby improving their social status. It is often a cheaper means of attending school for the student since some people may not be able to leave their places of work to go to school full time.

Writing about the Namibian experience with open and distance learning, Nekongo-Nielson observes that:

Open and distance learning has also influenced the social landscape of the country. The graduates, as professional people in their own right are employed and adding value to both the social order of their communities and development projects that are taking place in those communities. Since they have gained knowledge and skills and they are at different level of understanding, they assist in designing strategies that address challenges that face their communities.

Nekongo-Nielson goes further to show that:

Open and distance learning has also contributed to developing best practices in teaching and learning, noting that those of them in dual mode institutions came to realize that full time lecturers and professors who have worked with them in developing study materials and tutorial techniques that are appropriate for distance learning tend to adopt these teaching methods and techniques and use them for their full time teaching. Since the introduction of open and distance learning in Namibia, students at the four public institutions have been increasing. Many Namibians are accessing education. For instance, currently 45% of the University of Namibia student population is studying at a distance. 99% of CES students are working and play important roles in their communities. When it comes to addressing development goals, these are the people in the forefront of development, many of them in rural areas where development is most needed (Nkongo-Nielson).

CONCLUSION

Open and distance learning is important for Nigeria's democratic transformation because it makes education and training accessible for

more people at less cost without compromising quality. It provides equity in educational pursuit and serves as an avenue for professional development making available improved resources for the learners to acquire new skills. The beneficiaries are better equipped to contribute to the development of their immediate communities and the country at large. **There is also a new international** policy discourse around lifelong learning which open and distance education ensures. This policy discourse emphasizes that open and distance education is giving birth to a 'learning society' capable of recognizing the need for continuing education and training to ensure employability.

However, just like most sectors in the country, the open and distance learning suffers from lack of adequate attention due to paucity of funds and availability of support infrastructure. Therefore, in order to make it work, this paper advocates the following:

1. The government should provide more funds the various institutions offering open distance learning to enable them meet the basic needs of providing services to their students.
2. While delivering courses to improve on existing skill, course content should be tailored to meet the needs of developing economy in a digital age. Nigeria needs to raise its technology stake. There must be better opportunities for open and distance learning students to

embrace ICT and translate the skills into the nation's technological development.

3. Experts in the private sector should be encouraged to provide instructional services to learners in specific fields of endeavour to make studies more relevant to the demand of the present age. This should ensure a faster transformation of the country.

Thank you.

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