

Networking for National Development:

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Opportunities for Nigerian Graduates and Professionals in the Diaspora – Education and Globalization in Perspective.



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For many years, Nigerians have aspired to leave the shores of Nigeria for greener pastures, and for the most part have done so for three main reasons:

- Immigration and settlement in foreign lands
- Financial prosperity and stability
- Educational and professional quality and relevance

These days however, globalization has taken a stronger hold on the world's economies, and today's graduates and professionals are now faced with a changing workplace and a whole new demand on their abilities and their skills.

The global level playing field

The world is still as multi-faceted and competitive as it has always been, but with the technological and infrastructural advancement of the last 10 years, the global competitive playing field is being levelled or equalised – and opportunities for international collaboration between individuals, institutions, corporations and whole Nations (including disaggregation, distribution and remote development) are now so commonplace that the small business man can now be in direct competition with the big multi-national corporations. Intellectual work (capital) can now be delivered from anywhere in the world in real time. As we speak, there are qualified chartered accountants in Bangalore doing tax returns for American citizens over the internet, who have never left the borders of India their entire lives. There are British software developers working on Chinese computer systems designed by Americans in California and there are South African Engineers working on American rigs in the Middle East.

For the last 10 years, and especially since the recent global economic downturn, the world has become a much smaller and more even marketplace for skilled workers, and everyone is looking for the most cost effective way to employ skilled labour (also known as knowledge workers). And the preference is for them to be in cheap locations so that their employers only have to pay for their skills and results rather than also pay a premium for their upkeep.

Consider this quote from the last International Outsourcing Forum held in Madrid, Spain in February 2010 (see: www.tioforum.com):

There is no doubt that companies are now under huge pressure to show evidence of cost reduction, but this also needs to be achieved through a sustainable model..., supplier value propositions are under the microscope as clients look to ensure not only value for money, but also strategic success... In addition, the amount of highly skilled labour currently unemployed around the world has made staffing a shared service centre or centre of excellence somewhat easier, in turn making the competitive landscape for IPAs (Investment Promotion Agencies) more fierce.

Now in its 8th year, IOF is seeking to provide an ideal opportunity for senior executives charged with outsourcing responsibilities to meet with major outsourcing supplier organisations and IPAs from all over the world in order to find the right people with the most

marketable skills for the most appropriate, challenging, and rewarding jobs on the market for their companies. And they are literally looking all over the world for these knowledge workers.

Therefore it is no longer a matter of location these days, but rather an issue of skill and capacity development. It no longer matters where you live or what your nationality is, if you are a knowledge worker, opportunities will find you and productively employ your services from any corner of the world for use in every other part of the world.

So the question then becomes: How educated are you? and what specific knowledge can you uniquely bring to the table? What do you know and what do your peers (colleagues, countrymen or business partners) know? Because only that will determine how far your group (company, business or economy) grows in this globalised world.

The Current National Skills Gap

It would seem however that most of the Nigerians who have had the foresight to prepare themselves adequately for the global level playing field have also taken the initiative to leave Nigeria to build in themselves the capacity required for global competitiveness and are now living in western Nations, learning more and earning more as they grow, and most importantly, contributing to the economic development of these foreign countries at the expense of their own. In other words, many Nigerians that can contribute quickly and meaningfully to our National growth and development are not at home to do so, and many of those that are at home either do not have the opportunities to develop their skills or are so disillusioned that they are on their way out as well.

In 2007 the then Minister of Education, Dr. (Mrs.) Oby Ezekwesili, referring to Nigeria's need for improvement in its educational system, revealed that 70 per cent of the graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions are unemployed, underemployed and unemployable. And shortly afterward, the then Governor of the Central Bank, Prof. Charles Soludo, also commented along similar lines when he said that over 60 per cent of the people who apply for jobs in Nigeria are unemployable - which means that they don't have the skills commensurate to their university degrees. Put simply, the educational system in Nigeria today does not equip its graduates to meet the challenges of today's global workplace.

But the fact remains that Nigeria needs to grow to the point where we can compete favourably with other Nations, and for Nigeria to become a developed Nation in a few years, we need Nigerians to make it happen. We need to open up opportunities for young Nigerians to be right in the middle of the development trend by teaching them what they need to know, and equipping them with the tools required for personal capacity development, which through effective collaboration will in time grow and become National development.

Creative, Lateral Thinking – providing an enabling environment for National development through creativity

Economic development is all about creating opportunities for the people to desire, design, develop and deploy new and better ways of living, working and educating (entertaining) themselves. As the Government recognises the need for development, they go about creating an enabling environment for the everyday person to explore every opportunity and utilise every privilege for the benefit and growth of the economy (the people).

As Thomas L. Friedman explained in his bestselling book: *The World is Flat – The Globalized world in the twenty-first century*, a country's decision to develop [when all the economies of the world are adapting to and taking advantage of all the new platforms for collaboration and competition which have essentially flattened the world], is really a decision to focus on getting four basic things right:

- **Infrastructure** - The first is the right infrastructure to connect more people with the flat-world platform (from basic uninterrupted power supply, and reliable postal services, to affordable and accessible telecommunications facilities such as mobile phones and reasonably sufficient internet bandwidth, and modern airports and roads).
- **Education** - The second is the right educational system to get more people innovating and collaborating on the world's new level playing field. This is where graduates and professionals in the Diaspora come in. We need your expertise and professional relationships to take advantage of new opportunities for local capacity development.
- **Governance** - Third is the right governance (from fiscal policy to the rule of law to the quality of the bureaucracy) to manage the flow between our people and the rest of the world in the most productive way possible.
- **Environment** - Fourth, we need the right environment. You can get along as a country for a number of years while despoiling your environment. But at the end of the day, countries that preserve their green spaces are much more likely to preserve and attract the knowledge workers – who are more mobile, have choices, and can make the decisive difference in turning a developing country into a developed one.

Thomas Friedman's book went on to win the Financial Times/Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award in 2005.

Friedman also said that...

"...with all the discussion about the economics of globalization, people lose sight of the fact that globalization is also a competition between one country's public sector and another's. That means that you need a quality bureaucracy to channel, govern, and enhance the creative energies of a country so your people, as individuals, can not only imagine new products and services but also bring them to life and take them to the marketplace."

Development, therefore, is a creative process, and creativity is a function of imagination, which is ignited by learning. Therefore, economic growth and development hinges mainly on education, i.e. the quality of practical, collaborative and advanced education available to a country's citizens.

Innovation and Collaboration opportunities in Nigeria Today

Opportunities for graduates and professionals in the Diaspora include, among others:

- Explosion of Private Universities all over Nigeria – which means that there is now a larger forum for formal teaching, and project development in tertiary institutions. Because they are privately owned, there is little or no bureaucracy in the system, so you can advance more quickly and effectively than before.



- Training and Consultancy roles – You can now come in as a Consultant or as a business to provide expertise in various fields, including education, to help bring international standardisation to industry; you can train and even certify others to do what you do.
- Teaching and research – You can start an educational services company for the human capacity development for Africans. And using the various trust funds available now, such as the Education Trust Fund, you can do research and project development in almost any field of study. With your western degree, you are very highly employable and can also use your contacts to attract foreign Grants.
- Scholarships and Grants – For those who have a desire to further their education abroad, possibly to earn higher degrees, being in the Nigerian education sector opens up many scholarship and grant opportunities for you. International bodies such as the Petroleum Training Development Fund (PTDF) offer full postgraduate scholarships for Engineering and Petroleum related courses. They give priority to staff of Universities. There is also the Commonwealth scholarship, which is open to all fields of study; as well as the Bilateral European agreement scholarship, which is available to those who wish to study in Countries such as Hungary, Russia, Greece, and Malaysia etc.
- Salaries – Compared to the British Pound Sterling or US Dollar, the Nigerian pay scale may seem relatively small but by Nigerian standards, there is a lot of money available to graduates these days as long as you go for the right roles. In the educational sector, especially in tertiary institutions, the new Consolidated University Academic Salary Scale guarantees that you get significant increases to pay as you achieve higher academic qualifications.
- Other Benefits – There are many other benefits to being a vital part of the Nigerian developmental process today, especially in the education sector. Consultancy work is immeasurably available, and with current telecommunications and infrastructural developments you can now live anywhere and work in Nigeria as you contribute to National development from where you are. By working in a place where you are always regarded as a valuable citizen, and where there are further education opportunities, business and consultancy opportunities, employment opportunities, political opportunities, as well as many opportunities to gain valuable experience in your field of study, the greatest opportunity that exists in Nigeria now is the opportunity for you to be who you want to be.

Resources and Contacts

The 80 billion Naira investment fund for Nigerians abroad

The current Nigerian Government has made available a total of 80 billion Naira in the NRF (National Resource Fund) for Nigerians in Diaspora who are interested in investing in the Nigerian economy. According to the proposal unfolded by the minister in Berlin, Germany, any Nigerian citizen interested in participating in the country's industrialisation but lacks the means could draw from the fund. The money is part of the National Resource Fund (NRF)

meant for local capacity building, technology transfer, and product standardisation as a means to boosting the country's export in manufactured goods. In the course of the discussion in Berlin, the minister also revealed that the country needed the expertise of Nigerians in the Diaspora in such fields as meteorology, metallurgy and petrochemicals in order to grow the national economy.

The Education Trust Fund

The Education Trust Fund (ETF) in Nigeria is currently targeting individual public institutions with funds for specific projects. The ministry of education and public schools submit proposals etc which ETF approve. They are focussed strictly on fresh projects and ideas only, no renovations. They are for Student-centered projects and are meant for the provision of Infrastructure and hardware facilities for quality education.

Each state has its own ETF allocation and Proposals for ETF funded projects must be made through the provost of each institution according to ETF specifications

TOKTEN Initiatives – Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals

These are initiatives being funded by the United Nations where foreign-trained Nigerians take few months to go back to Nigeria and engage in impacting their knowledge to targeted areas.

NISA – The Nigerian International Students Agenda is an Xn Foundation initiative and is part of the ICONS programme.

NIDO – The Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation, has chapters in many countries, including several in Europe and America.

ANA – The Association of Nigerians Abroad is an internet based, non partisan organisation seeking the growth and development of Nigeria through contributions from Nigerians abroad.

Nigerian National Volunteer Scheme – Attached to the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the federation, NNVS was created to explore more ways to integrate Nigerians abroad in national development, they plan to compile a database on the contributions of Nigerian groups abroad to various programmes and events at home.

Contact: NNVService@yahoo.com or Joeckeshi@Yahoo.com

Or write: The Coordinator (NNVS), Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Federal Secretariat Complex, Shehu Shagari Way, Abuja.

Nigerian Investment Promotions Commission

In line with its objectives of sensitising the public on investment opportunities in the country, the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) has lined up series of activities to sell the Nigeria investment profile to Nigerians abroad.

The purpose of the forum is to present to Nigerians and their foreign investor allies the business opportunities in Nigeria which many of them may not know about because of their long absence from the country.

House Representatives Committee on the Diaspora

Only recently, the House of Representatives established a House Standing Committee on Diaspora Affairs, with well known broadcaster and Reps member, Abike Dabiri-Erewa as its chairperson. The committee is to work in tandem with Nigerians abroad to exploit their potentials towards the rapid development of the country. We understand that the House is considering the idea of establishing a National Commission on Diaspora, which will then take on the role of acquiring a database on all professional Nigerians working abroad. They aim to acquire this information using well established international collaborative establishments abroad such as NISA and NIDO.

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