

**TEXT OF THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC LECTURE OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LOKOJA DELIVERED BY PROF. IBRAHIM AGBOOLA GAMBARI ENTITLED "THE RELEVANCE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN INNOVATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TOWN AND GOWN SYMBIOSIS" HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2023**

1.0 Salutations

2.0 It is with great honor that I stand before you today to deliver this public lecture on a topic that is very dear to me and more importantly critical in the growth of universities, but also host communities where these institutions are domiciled. Firstly, as some of you may know, I began my professional work life career as an academic at the City University of New York and spent a significant part of my working life as a diplomat and a public servant. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, I have had the singular honor of straddling the two divides and can readily relate how university education impacts innovation and can shape and advance Town and Gown relationships.

3.0 I must extend my very warm courtesies to the Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Lokoja, Professor Olayemi Akinwunmi and his management team for presenting me with this opportunity. Indeed I have received and continue to deliver public lectures, but this topic is special and especially dear to my heart, particularly at this period in our nation's history.

4.0 The topic titled ***“The Relevance of University Education in Innovation for the Advancement of Town and Gown Symbiosis”***. Although a mouthful, does pack in one sentence many matters that are not only topical, but very germane in today's world. A world that has technology as a principal driver or as Techies call it “disruptor” in all facets of human interaction. A world where the definition of a university education have evolved from Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyseum, while still retaining key fundamental tenets i.e. learning organized around scholars and learned persons as the deliverers to today's virtual learning environment whereby students sitting in Lokoja can take classes being delivered by a lecturer in Beijing,

New York or Sao Paulo. Notwithstanding that the objective remains the same, i.e acquisition of knowledge in furtherance of the human endeavor either individually, or collectively as nation states.

5.0 Before I begin to dissect this topic, our gathering here should be cognizant of the very important place in history of this memorable city Lokoja and by extension this institution. This institution was established in 2011, alongside 8 other Federal institutions by the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonanthan, and I can only imagine the efforts that went into its birth. I will subsequently address this in my talk.

6.0 The city as everyone is aware was the capital of British Northern Nigeria and the administrative center for British colonial government following the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. It is currently projected to have a population of about One million people. The rationale behind its adoption as an administrative capital, amongst other reasons, was due to

its geographical location and ability to serve as a warehousing or logistics hub as goods were moved from the Northern part of the Country to the Southern and vice-versa. I will later return to this specific point as it serves a critical launching pad for what the future holds for this city and our Nation.

7.0 I will like to breakdown the topic of my presentation today into a number of buckets. In the first bucket, it is important that we review the relevance of a University Education relative to Innovation. The second bucket will explore the very important question of Town and Gown relationships.

8.0 A university education could be framed as investments in students that yield benefits in the long run, for both the students, their families and their environments. In Nigeria, the goals of higher education, and especially university education include contributing to national development through the training of high-level manpower, and the provision of affordable and accessible quality learning

opportunities according to the needs and interests of all Nigerians. It also includes the provision of high-quality career counseling and lifelong learning for self-reliance, reduction of skills shortages, promotion of scholarship, entrepreneurship, and community service, ensuring national unity, and promotion of national and international synergy for needed growth and development (*FRN/NPE, 2013*). But for all this to hold true, there also needs to be investments in the University as citadels of learning. It is this investment that allows students to reach what academics have described as the Knowledge frontiers and exploit their natural talents.

*(Education and Innovation; B Biasi, D Deming and P Moser ).*

9.0 Additionally, a deliberate policy that encourages investment in research universities play an important role in knowledge creation and innovation, also liberalized access to such institutions would inevitably lead to huge gains in innovation. The attainment of the goals of university education, as identified above, requires the

interdependence and close collaboration of the town and the gown (*Ogola- Emma & Amini-Philips, 2021*) Hence Olatoye (2023) identified at least three possible forms of relationship between the town and the gown.

9.1 The first is the **Commensalism relationship** in which either the university (gown) or host community (town) benefits while the other derives neither benefit nor harm. While this form relationship is not encouraged but it does exist, for instance, when the management of universities are indifferent to the interest of host communities in respect of employment, capacity building, information dissemination, corporate social responsibilities. This often generate tensions, conflicts, social unrest, and invariably academic disruption thereby defeating the attainment of higher education goals.

9.2 The second form of relationship is the **Parasitic relationship**. This exists when either the town or gown whereby one enjoys maximum benefit while the other party suffers. This could happen when universities are located, for example, where

farmlands markets, or host community's historical treasures exist or when host communities perform traditional rituals or atonement to deities without giving adequate notice to the institutions located within their territories for appropriate measures to be taken to forestall avoidable calamities which could lead to loss of life or breakdown of law and order.

9.3 The third and ideal form of relationship is the **Symbiotic relationship**. It exists when both the town and the gown derive mutual and optimal benefits from their interaction in ways that ensure peace and safety, employment generation, capacity building of locals, enhanced corporate social responsibilities, and mutual collaborations on multi-dimensional areas that facilitate the achievement of the goals of higher education and the development requirements of the host community.

10.0 In today's world where technology is a key driver and no longer a competitive tool but an existential tool its adoption in the delivery of education at a lesser cost plays

an important role in providing access and enriching the pipeline of talent that departs the university on an annual basis.

11.0 The function of the community used broadly to mean industry, government and innovation, towards maintaining and supporting its relationship with the academia which ultimately leads to the development of education cannot be overemphasized. For many decades, large manufacturing corporations realized that investments in research institutions was not only beneficial for their survival and ability to stay ahead of the market, while maintaining market share and churning new products from their assembly lines, but equally important, is the ability to co-habitate. To-coexist in the same physical space. A careful study of Silicon Valley will show how the tech industry evolved by being around academic institutions such as Stanford University, Cal Tech etc. Furthermore, an entire eco-system of Technology financiers now relocated their operations and large banks domiciled their tech funding desks and subsidiaries in close proximity to these



Tech innovators. These further drives home the point of co-habitation.

12.0 Similarly, if you carefully examine the bio-tech space you would notice that a city like Boston – which houses strong research institutions like MIT, Harvard, Boston University, Univ of Massachusetts has also evolved as a hub for the bio-tech space. And you can therefore clearly see the chain of events. Targeted investment in the educational institutions has yielded great research ideas and researchers who in turn have worked in close collaboration with corporations to commercialize these ideas into products, drugs, technology etc for our everyday use.

13.0 What therefore remains very clear, is that one of the conditions of the production of high-quality innovative content is reliant on the ability to reach the knowledge frontier. As technology evolves the frontier also shifts outwards increasing the burden of knowledge on potential inventors. If we therefore believe in innovation as a

cumulative process, then we also must agree that so is education whereby access to basic education and skills provide the building blocks upon which all subsequent knowledge rests upon. A good education with great foundation builds cognitive and non-cognitive skills and places a potential innovator on the pathway to attaining the knowledge frontier.

14.0 Hidden in this maze of interdependent relationships is what academics have described as Endogenous growth theory – this theory emphasizes that economic growth is due to factors that are internal to the economy and not because of external drivers. It goes further to ascertain those improvements in innovation, knowledge and human capital – all endogenous factors lead to increased productivity, positively affecting the economic outlook of a country.

15.0 What this theory has espoused is whilst the University provides the large pot that allows all different ingredients to be stirred and infused together, the ingredients remain

an integral part of the process. The ingredients in particular is the Human Capital that is brought to bear in making the dream a reality. In academia, there is an ongoing debate on how Human Capital is formed. Some argue that it is from years of Education and investments which produces valuable knowledge and contribute to innovation and growth, and define innovation itself as an accumulation of new knowledge that is built on existing knowledge. Others are more specific and narrow stressing the importance of scientific knowledge for innovation and growth and others highlighting mentorship as a critical element in the development and production of innovators.

16.0 Regardless of which school of thought one subscribes to, what is clear is that there is a correlation stemming from higher education to research and innovation. But we must not forget that academic course content also has to keep up with the pace of a fast-expanding knowledge frontier. You would note that I have restricted myself to establishing how there's a linkage between University Education – and – Innovation- with investments and

Human Capital as key drivers. I have not attempted to address a well-known fall out that emanates from this discussion which would be are innovators born or can they made. Perhaps that will be the subject of my next discussion at my next invite.

17.0 Before I close on this topic it is important that I touch on the convergence of innovation and entrepreneurship. A body of people seem to use both interchangeably, however one can see why it is a commonly made error because of their interrelationships, institutions have developed and designed entire diploma and degree programs around teaching these skills. Innovation is known as the creation of new ideas or methods, while entrepreneurship is the process of executing those ideas and building an enterprise by individuals and communities.

18.0 As we depart momentarily the topic of the Relevance of University Education in Innovation, lets remember the following takeaways – Innovation relies on the deployment of new knowledge built on an accumulation of

old knowledge, these are borne out of continuous research and deployment of Human Capital which are enabled and catalyzed by investments and funding from public and/or private means which often times are found to co-locate themselves to these sources of knowledge that we have now identified as Universities.

## **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TOWN AND GOWN**

19.0 The classical town and gown collaboration in Nigeria can be said to have been kickstarted by the relationship between the University of Ibadan and the Western Regional Government, ostensibly because the University College Ibadan was the premier university in Nigeria. Chief Simeon Adebó, as head of the Western Nigerian bureaucracy immediately understood that if he must succeed as the head of the civil service under the political astuteness of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, he needed more than the input of public servants in the translation of policies into concrete infrastructures that benefit the people. He thus leveraged the contiguous presence of the

Universities of Ibadan and Ife and the world class scholarship of intellectuals like Professors Biobaku, Aboyade, Aluko, Mabogunje, and others, into a regular Regional Economic Planning Advisory committee (the A club) and an Administrative Research Group (*Olaopa 2022*). These two groups contained intellectually sound scholars and administratively experienced public officers whose sole responsibility was to dedicate time to analytic thinking and reflection on critical issues agitating the civil service at any time. I also witnessed in the late 70's when the late Gov. Abubakar Rimi was elected in Kano, he similarly relied on the Ahmadu Bello University to form the intellectual core of his advisory team by colleagues of mine from the then Faculty of Arts and Social Science- (FASS) Dr. Bala Usman, Dr. Bala Mohammed and Dr. Haroun Al-Rashid Adamu these members of the gown acutely shaped policies of the that impacted the town.

20.0 The decision to situate Universities and Institutions of Higher learning in specific geographic locations are very deliberate and the output of significant horse trading and stake-holder activism especially in Nigeria. In my previous

life, I was privy to host several of such groups who acting well within their rights as leaders in their communities, had sought to see my Principal the former President Muhammadu Buhari, in order to plead their case as to why a particular, Federal University, or Medical Center or College of Education should be located in their community.

21.0 Why do these community leaders feel driven to lobby the Federal Government or any relevant agency for the domiciliation of this institution in their preferred locale. The gown, according to (Igbal, 2021) are key players in the global knowledge economy, essential participants in the emerging innovation systems, and active stakeholders that play a pivotal role in the process of innovation and knowledge commercialization for the development of the town. The development of the town via an immediate injection of capital by the Government in the form of startup funds into the community, thus economic activity is either birthed or re-charged by this investment, employment is immediately brought to the local community by way of construction jobs, supply of building

materials amongst other value chain activities that support such a project.

22.0 So The Emirs, Chiefs, Obas, eminent sons and daughters of the soil having made several visits and deployed significant goodwill and social capital are successful. The Federal Government has just announced that a Federal University has been approved and will be built in their geographic location as they had so wished. This announcement distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, jumpstarts the relationship between Town & Gown. In academic circles, this relationship has been described as an “arranged marriage” in which partners have no choice, but to be together, secondly, divorce is not a realistic option for the town-gown partners. Infact, Town & Gown relationships are the true embodiment of the phrase “till death do us part”.

23.0 Recent events around the globe have pointed to us what happens if theres a rupture in the town-gown relationship. Specifically, we were all witness to the unfortunate global



public health trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic. Where there was a global shutdown of activity across all works of life, supply chains were disrupted, medical practitioners had to be repurposed, borders were shutdown, travel between countries in many instances were cancelled. Many businesses suffered and went bankrupt and to this day have remained so.

24.0 How did this global shutdown affect towns which have been known to serve as host communities to institutions of higher learning. A university with a student population in the tens of thousands, was suddenly unable to function due to the physical absence of students. People whose sole occupation evolved around the presence of these students were suddenly caught of guard, from the shoe shiner/cobbler to commuter buses/ porters in the hostels who relied on daily tips. All the way to Landlords who rented off-campus housing to students were suddenly caught in a very difficult position.

25.0 What we see here are the building blocks and the many moving parts of a symbiotic relationship between these two elements. In the early part of my talk, I had begun sketching a scenario in making the case for how innovation is birthed from the University, I also mentioned how large corporates are desirous of maintaining a physical presence in close proximity to institutions that foster ideas which could be transformed and commercialized. I mentioned well-known clusters like Silicon Valley and Bio-Tech industries whose growth and location capitalize on the existence of strong research institutions, and they transform those locations.

26.0 With the growth of these clusters there's a sudden explosion of higher earning jobs that attract very skilled people, improved contribution to the tax pool, property values begin to rise, while the town witnesses an expansion in terms of size, and an overall improvement of other services and quality of life. These developments do not happen without a firmly established basis for

cooperation and collaboration between the Town & Gown components.

27.0 I recall during my time in KWASU as Pro-chancellor, the Vice -Chancellor and management team spearheaded the formation of the Centre for Community Development. The centre adopted a bottom-up approach in implementing its community development activities throughout Kwara State and beyond, administering action research grants, supervising and coordinating lecturers' community development projects in local communities, and training KWASU students and awarding certificates in community development to all students who met the requirements. This initiative helped in cultivating the relationship between the newly established institution and the local community. KWASU which is just two years older than this institution, today has a slogan in which it champions the Environment and Community Development and continues to support the development of ideas by students and staff towards innovation in support of the Maletе community and the entire state. Such is an example of Town and

Gown collaboration that I am proud to have witnessed and been a part of.

28.0 The ability to maximize the potential of the Town & Gown relationship, completely resides in these partners commitment to align their priorities and have a harmonious working relationship. The Gown must be cognizant of not isolating themselves and ensure they descend from their ivory tower and engage with the town, build inroads into the community, and embrace them with open arms and finding a way to embed them into the campus. The town on the other, should also understand the enormous responsibilities that comes with playing host, to a very diverse group of people young and old, who may not fully understand the nuances of their cultures, societal norms and traditions and learn to accommodate by being warm, friendly and hospitable.

29.0 Accordingly, many scholars have stated that both the campus and the town have mutual concerns about shared facilities, utilities, cultural centers, social centers, safety

and health, population management, economic development and land use. The demand for these services is constantly evolving. There is a never ending need to manage them in the present as well as plan for them in the future. Neither the school nor the town can have the economic means to take on the complete burden of satisfying these needs. Duplication of services, however, is wasteful and universities and towns must thereafter work together. The only route to achieving these successes is through mutual planning and shared recognition and responsibility. This planning and collaboration must address the potential benefits and burdens for both the school and the town. Thus to plan effectively for the future both the School and the town must decide what they want for the future, what they can invest for the future and they can cooperate toward that shared future which will be mutually beneficial.

30.0 Having spent the last few minutes describing why this relationship is critical for both parties, what the benefits are , I would like to mention before I close How to go

about achieving this. Repeatedly, there must be an understanding and recognition from both parties about the importance of each other. The leadership of the Gown must also be purposeful in establishing lines of communication with the community leaders. There must be a dedicated resource whose singular goal is to on a day to day basis to cultivate and prioritize matters concerning Town and Gown relations thereby turning plans into measurable action steps that can demonstrably executed.

31.0 As I approach the end of my talk I had mentioned earlier on the importance of this great city Lokoja in the history of our country, how it evolved and what it was known for. It still retains that geographic advantage being at the nerve center of so many supply chains that criss-cross the country. This is a comparative advantage that can be capitalized by members of the Town and Gown establishment. The study of supply chain and the elements that make it flourish could be an interesting point of convergence that could bring together the objectives of both of parties. If properly designed supply chain hubs are

equally as important as their manufacturing hubs. This is the challenge that I leave with the Lokoja – Town and Gown establishment.

32.0 Thank you for the warm reception and the invitation to share my thoughts on this subject.