

# LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

## Education: A Leadership imperative

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LEADERSHIP is sustained by character but is principally built around capacity. Education contributes significantly to leadership capacity because it provides not only knowledge but also the opportunities to develop ability. Education can come in many ways: formal, on-the-job, informal, vocational, personal development and more. All these prepare for leadership in various capacities. Unfortunately, our education today is not what it should be, for example in the quality of the curriculum and its relevance and ability to prepare people for future challenges and opportunities. Increasingly we see young people (especially those who have passed through public education) unable to measure up to what is required of them in the marketplace.

The problems causing this are numerous: from underfunded schools and universities, to the politicisation of universities, and the proliferation of educational institutions.....the list goes on. It is no surprise that we churn out large numbers of graduates (reflective of our burgeoning population) but not commensurate quality. In all this though, Nigerian students with their resilience still manage to stand out. It reminds me of the primary school student in Ondo who, intent on doing her homework and not be deterred by the lack of electricity at home, resorted to using the light of the ATM machine in a nearby bank.

What motivated me to write this?

Someone in manufacturing speaking to me recently, lamented about the quality of staff. Complaints like this unfortunately have their root in a poor education. Education is important because it shapes a person's world view, piques their curiosity, and hones problem solving - which all help develop leadership ability. It's tough living in Nigeria, but for a young person desiring a good education and opportunities thereafter, it is even tougher.

Education (in its various dimensions) provides and leverages the capabilities required to solve the numerous problems prevalent in the world today - which is needed when people find themselves in leadership positions. It is not about degrees or qualifications for their sake but their applicability in the world, especially in situations we each find ourselves in. To build leaders at every level and ensure we have a constant pipeline of those who can be the best in their respective fields, education must be a nation's investment priority. This encompasses what we can call the whole educational chain and ecosystem. Take the teachers for example: where are they being trained to a high standard and in the required numbers? In higher education are there enough lecturers of the right pedigree, especially in the face of the demand created by the preponderance of universities?

Another issue is the size of our youth population, which is exploding. The age demographic of 0-24 years makes up about 62% of our overall population (CIA Factbook).



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With a youth population of this size, if education is not a priority - and a long-term one at that, it really is difficult if not impossible for any nation to succeed. The demographic dividend of a youthful population can only be gained when they have the education that positions them appropriately. What about migration? What is the effect of migration on our present and future leadership material? While we may have legitimate complaints about our educational system and opportunities locally, persistent migration robs us of the best that we have. We then end up celebrating Nigerians who are excelling abroad - and there is nothing wrong with this, but we seem to forget that many of them left be-

cause of a lack of opportunity here.

Education must be an urgent priority at all levels if we want to realistically say that we are building leaders of tomorrow. Education is not just a right, but also the smart strategy of a society that acts in its own self-interest. For a country it confers numerous advantages including providing a competent pool who can enter public service, and it also gives the edge in areas like research and innovation, providing a voice in global affairs.

But education is not just for the sake of it, because there are those who did not have formal education to a high level yet are acknowledged as effective leaders. Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of university, while Sir Richard Branson did not go at all, yet their impact globally is undeniable. Despite the apparent limitation in their formal education, because of the types of societies they grew up in, their curiosities were encouraged, and they had opportunities to maximise their abilities. Very importantly, the education they did have was of such a standard and quality to give them a solid foundation. Of course, lifelong learning will always be a critical tool for developing leadership ability.

The challenge of education is not solely the government's because we all have a role to play. Today's lack of reading culture which results in limiting leadership capacity and opportunities is an example of something we can work to change. All these throw a serious challenge to us all - policy makers and others, to

chart paths to truly empower and leverage our young people. How can Nigeria be competitive in the world especially in today's 4th Industrial revolution if education is not fit for purpose? Positive changes may be happening in pockets, particularly in the private sector, but until there is a critical mass, we will not see the change we desire.

It is a long road ahead, but we can start today to make different choices that will turn the situation around because education is indeed a leadership imperative.

Thank you and until next week, let me challenge you to begin to lead from where you are.



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