

Welcome Remarks

by

AARE AFE BABALOLA

OFR, CON, SAN, LL.D, D.Litt, FCI Arb, FNIALS,

**The President and Founder,
Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti**

On the occasion of the opening of the
UNESCO Staff Retreat on Regional Programmes

Holding at

**Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, (ABUAD)
Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State**

8th September 2014

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All protocols duly observed.

I join the Vice Chancellor, Prof. M. O. Ajisafe to welcome our amiable and esteemed Professor Mrs. Alidou, Regional Director of UNESCO in West Africa to the first UNESCO staff retreat on regional programmes in Nigeria holding on ABUAD campus.

I consider it a great honour for choosing ABUAD for the first UNESCO staff retreat on regional programmes.

I was informed that this retreat is aimed at implementing three strategies as follows:

- (a) Validate the UNESCO Regional Programme within the 8 countries in the region for 2014 and 2015;
- (b) Validate UNESCO strategy to enhance its visibility and knowledge management; and
- (c) Formulate UNESCO strategy for resources mobilization.

From the foregoing, one of the objectives of this retreat is to enhance the visibility of UNESCO. I sincerely believe that ABUAD is the proper place to hold the retreat because it **offers an instant launching pad to popularise your visibility**. Another objective of this retreat is to enhance UNESCO's knowledge management. Again with all humility, I say, ABUAD is the right venue having regard to the ABUAD's pragmatic approach to education and its reformative programme for quality and functional education. Again, another objective of the retreat is to enable UNESCO to formulate strategy for resource management. Again, I say, ABUAD is the right place in view of its acclaimed success in resources management.

I asked myself how can an international organization best envisage the ways in which it can influence or promote the creative activities of man, so as to promote the welfare of the entire human species most effectively and most enduringly?

My simple answer is that education is the most effective way of influencing and promoting the welfare of man. A retreat is an acknowledged way of educating participants practical and slow way to achieve such objective. A retreat is a place where a person goes for a time in order to be quiet, pray and mediate. The UNESCO retreat starting today certainly will provide the opportunity for UNESCO staff to identify key milestones for the validation and implementation of UNESCO's strategic plan for the region.

Records show that education is a major programme of UNESCO. In his keynote address, delivered at the opening ceremony of the UNESCO-CEPES International Jubilee Conference on "Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Its Role and Contribution to Our Common Advancement",

Bucharest, 6–8 September 2002, Sir John Daniel, the former Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO (2001-2004), underscored how education was (and still is) important to UNESCO, noting that: **“Education has been at the center of the activities of UNESCO since the organization was set up in 1946.”** Therefore UNESCO has put education on top of its development agenda.

It is heart-warming and I believe UNESCO Regional Office in Abuja must be happy that both high and low in this part of the world appreciate what you are doing in the sphere of education so much so that when I intimated the IITA that this retreat will take place in ABUAD, the Deputy Director General, Prof. Kenton Dashiell warmed up to it and spontaneously agreed to come to ABUAD and address this august gathering.

I wish to seize this opportunity to pay special tribute to Dr. Aicha Lalla Ben Barka for the beautiful letter I received from UNESCO Headquarters in Paris **inviting ABUAD for collaboration on the UNESCO Flagship Programme 2 entitled:** "Strengthening education systems for sustainable development in Africa: improving equity, quality and relevance and for acknowledging ABUAD as a prestigious university.

Failure of International Programmes

Evidence has shown over time that one of the critical factors that contribute to failure of international programmes in various countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is lack of home ownership of such programmes. The attitudes of the populace in the host countries have always been that of alienation from such international programmes. This makes it

difficult for the host to fully participate and take lead roles to ensure that such programmes succeed.

I therefore suggest that strategies adopted by the UNESCO after this retreat should be based on full integration of all the stakeholders necessary for its success.

I have no doubt that UNESCO is already thinking in this direction, considering its strategic alliance with Progressive Institutions in Nigeria and other countries such as Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti. The choice of this university as the venue for this all-important retreat eloquently validates this position. It is therefore with much pleasure that I shall now proceed to highlight the relevance of our university to this 2014 UNESCO retreat.

Relevance of ABUAD to the objectives of the retreat:

The sum-total of the objective of this retreat is the enhancement of the quality of education in the sub-region and most certainly, both UNESCO and ABUAD have a common ground on the enhancement of the quality of education in Nigeria in particular and the world in general.

The emergence of the reputation of ABUAD as a model university is predicated on the strategy and objectives of your retreat and therefore makes ABUAD relevant to your objective and a useful Case Study during your retreat. I will therefore like to spend some time to elaborate on how we have made it so quickly that we have become not only a “model”, but a reference point and benchmark on **how a university should be run.**

But why is ABUAD so unique?

My decision to establish the University arose from the rot and decay I saw first-hand and bare-facedly during my two-term tenure as Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council at the University of Lagos. Together with my colleagues in the Council and the University Administration, we were able to do the little we could to turn the fortunes of UNILAG around so much so that that university became the best around that time and I was voted Best Pro-Chancellor twice (2005 and 2006) by NUC which also named UNILAG as No. 1 university in the country at that time.

But for me, that was not enough as I had to leave the university at the expiration of my two term. I then decided to establish this 21st Century University to be a leader in quality, functional and reformatory education an example of what a 21st century university should be. Thank God we are achieving our goal and vision. We have won many Awards, Acknowledgments and Recognitions nationally and internationally, including the ones from UNESCO and Oxford University, NUC, Africa Student Union, professional bodies, medical, law, accounting, banking etc.

As a matter of fact, I had wanted to name the university **Model University**, but I was persuaded against it in favour of allowing the color, character and achievements of the university to speak for it. We are quite elated that within one year of its existence, the NUC, the Regulatory Body for University education in Nigeria said what we were doing here was a rare combination of magic and miracle in addition to our being a model, bench mark and a reference point in quality, functional and reformatory education.

Not only that, past presidents like Gen. Yakubu Gowon (rtd) and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as well as the incumbent

Nigerian President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, described it as a model with none like it around.

Secondly, this university bears my name following the advice of the Advisory Committee with its belief that the name is identified with and synonymous with determination, industry, discipline and integrity. Exactly two years after we commenced academic works here, a parent (named withheld) wrote a most elucidating and illuminating article titled **“ABUAD: Effects of the Brand name Afe Babalola”** in The Sun newspaper.

In the said article, the obviously impressed parent said:” **The name Afe Babalola struck me positively and triggered in me a sense of trust and confidence. There is no way the enviable personality trait and the profound qualities of Aare Afe Babalola’s professional life would not rub off on the educational standards and culture of the university. Already, that is perceivable from the human, material and structural resources on ground”**.

What is relevant to this retreat again about ABUAD is its serene environment. If the retreat is concerned about enhanced visibility and knowledge management, you will clearly appreciate that our university is a veritable Case Study. Although there has been a subsisting curriculum for universities in Nigeria since 1962, but in two years we went beyond the benchmark by adding four new pro programmes: Mechatronics, Human Biology, Social Justice and Intelligence & Security to buoy the quality and standard of education in this clime.

Another area relevant to the objective of this retreat is qualitative education. Here in ABUAD, we make education not only qualitative, but also functional. We have successfully

introduced Entrepreneurship training and Foreign languages as part of our curriculum here. When we observed that not many students are interested in Agriculture, we set up ABUAD Agricultural Enterprise whereby apart from making food available, we give our students who graduate in Agriculture some seed money to start their own businesses instead of looking for jobs that are in very short supply. We deliberately reduced tuition for student studying agriculture by 50%. Today, the ABUAD Agricultural Enterprise has become a Tourist Centre of some sort.

Another area which is relevant to this retreat is quality of teachers and leadership method. We have also succeeded in enhancing the quality of education through improved teaching methods. As a matter of fact, we were the first institution in Nigeria to hold a Workshop on Teaching Methods because we believe that in addition to the various degrees earned by teachers, teachers must of necessity know how to teach to be relevant and impactful in the type of education we want to give to our students. The whole country applauded our first outing in this regard and because of the success we recorded in the said first outing, the next Workshop is slated for later in the year. Both UNESCO and NUC have been invited to partner with us on learning method.

Again, today, our university has become a Tourist Centre not only to Nigerian Universities which daily throng here to understudy us on how a university should be run, but we moved a step higher and further when in November last year (at a time we were barely fours old) we were appointed as a Mentoring University to the new University for Industrial Development (UID) in Ghana.

Besides, we were one of the few universities in the world, **and the only one in Nigeria for that matter**, invited by the

United Kingdom-based UCIE Professors Network to participate at a three-day symposium at Balliol College, University of Oxford between September 27 and 29, 2014 to discuss the challenges facing education in the world.

One of the major challenges which UNESCO is tackling now is equity, accessibility and equal opportunities for both male and female and religious tolerance. In article published by a parent referred to earlier, the parent said that the reason why she chose ABUAD is that there is religious tolerance in ABUAD. We are in partnership with UNESCO on all that as we provide equal opportunities for both male and female students. This undoubtedly must be one of the reasons why within four years our enrolment moved from 240 students in 2010 to over 4,000 in three years and particularly as that parent acknowledged, there is no religious segregation here. This, in my belief, is one of the ways any country can progress and move forward.

There are various opportunities for scholarships to inspire students to excel and also to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Recommendation

In ending this speech, I will like to make recommendations on three issues, namely, curriculum development, funding of higher education, government divestment in public higher education, for the purposes of education reforms, policy change and transformation in Nigeria. Although these recommendations are of primary concern to Nigeria, they have regional and international ramifications too.

(i) Curriculum Development – In a time when change is constant, rapid, and unpredictable, universities (private or

public) should have the autonomy to develop their own curriculum based on their vision and perceived needs. In doing so, other than regulatory agencies exercising control over issues such as general criteria for the appointment of teachers, general benchmark for development of curriculum, and accreditation of courses for quality assurance purposes, all universities should be given the autonomy to make their own curriculum development decisions. I believe such autonomy can lead to responsibility and increased motivation, if nurtured correctly, in the higher education system in the country. Of course, the regulatory agencies should be empowered to close down illegal universities and sanction those ones that do not comply with basic requirements for the provision of equitable, quality and relevant educational services.

(ii) Funding of Higher Education – Evidence suggests that the most significant area of growth in the recent global expansion in higher education has been in privately provided higher education. The United States, Japan and Chile, for example, have well-established private higher education system. Almost all the major regions of the world have private higher education and those countries where it has existed for some time have seen such provision grow strikingly. In the last two decades new private provision has emerged in the Middle East (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Syria), in Africa (predominantly Anglophone rather than Francophone countries), while the fall of communism has seen rapid expansion of private provision in central and eastern Europe since the 1990s.

Yet this global expansion and the ever increasing popularity of undertaking higher learning programmes privately

require resources. The provision of higher education, unlike running a company, is, however, labour intensive and, hence, even unit costs are rising for public universities that depend on public funding as much for private ones that depend largely on tuition fees for their incomes.

While it is true that higher education creates wealth, and while it is also true that higher education is an engine of economic development, returns on investment in the higher education sector are characterized much more by time-lags of decades rather than a short-time return on investment. Therefore I suggest that Government should boost private university with financial aid commensurate with students' attendance to help the students pay tuition fees. In addition, government, alongside companies, supra-national organisations such UNESCO and World Bank should provide support to private providers of higher education to maintain equity, quality and standards for sustainable development.

(iii) Government Divestment in Public Higher Education –

Study has shown that the extent to which a university receives its funding from public or private sources does not determine the classification status of that university. Thus, public-private division of higher education means that neither ownership and funding, nor legal and regulatory control yields a clear-cut dichotomy, or what Levy called “ideal-type categories,” of privateness and publicness of universities. If that be the case, I will suggest a level playing field for funding of higher education (public or private) by government in terms of grants, scholarships, loan and payment of students' tuition fees. Again, commercial sector in Nigeria, including companies, consortia of companies, publicly-listed companies and government corporations

should be encouraged to support higher education, whether private or public, in providing and promoting equitable, quality and relevant education in the 21st century and beyond.

I want to close by thanking Professor (Mrs) Hassana Alidou and the entire UNESCO staff for choosing Afe Babalola University Ado Ekiti for this year UNESCO Regional Office in Abuja Staff Retreat.

I had the pleasure of meeting Professor Alidou for the first time in late 2013 when she accompanied Dr Laila Aicha Ben Barka, Assistant Director-General for UNESCO's Africa Department, who was being conferred with honorary Doctor of Letters by me. Since that time, she has built new partnership with ABUAD, strengthened the UNESCO's relationship focus with ABUAD, deepened the UNESCO's bilateral commitment with ABUAD, and fostered creative continuing educational initiatives for ABUAD's consideration. Thank you, Professor Alidou, for all you have done and for all that is yet to come. I truly appreciate your interest in my University.

I hope that everyone would take the results of this Workshop to develop ideas to ensure equity, quality and relevance of higher education for sustainability, essential to national, regional, and international academic, social, and cultural integration.

And my warm thanks to everyone again.