

**PROMOTING QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICA
THROUGH COLLABORATION, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND
TECHNOLOGY: AN EXPANDING FRONTIER**

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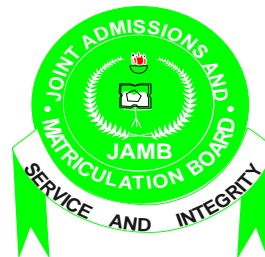
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PROTOCOL

It is a great privilege to have been given the platform to address the 9th Annual conference of the Association of West African Universities (AWAU) on this special occasion of the year 2024 conference. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Chairman and members of AWAU for this great honour. This year's conference is taking place at a time of major ruptures politically in West Africa and amidst other great strides and developments in university education, science, and technology in the sub-region. It is my belief that the knowledge derived from our gathering here shall contribute to finding solutions to the intractable problems of underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and misgovernance assailing the sub-region. We shall do so through the mantra of 'Quality Education, Collaboration, Regional Integration and technology.' This should advance for us, mutual reinforcement of the values designed to benefit from the changing trends in higher education globally.

At this juncture, may I pay homage to the founding fathers of AWAU and all men and women of goodwill who have contributed to the growth of this body. They have systematically ensured that the themes adopted year in year out, contribute to greater development in the region. I also thank our hosts for granting us this beautiful space and a wonderful welcome in their historic city of Cape Coast. We will attribute our future successes to your efforts and support for a more vibrant, inclusive, and progressive educational process and structure.

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin this lecture by sounding a note of warning. We are living in an age of structural change. A particularly important feature of this development is the recourse to the globalisation of ideas and processes. These changes have occurred in national spaces, educational spaces, and in international relations. How do these changes affect the quality of tertiary education in West Africa? First, these changes entail a high degree of **interdependence**. This has limited the

possibilities of or room for **autarky** (Nobili:1992:55). Secondly, as a respectable community of scholars and intellectuals, we should all be mindful of our roles as change agents. Our effectiveness will be measured not only by the successes we achieve with higher education alone but also through the increasing economic and social relevance of the structures that we put in place.

Our tasks here as scholars have become extremely important. This is with a view to accelerating the development of our higher institutions and the knowledge industry. Jane Knight (2017) has brought what we are doing here into bold relief when she asserted:

There is no question that the international dimension of higher education has transformed the higher education landscape in the last three decades. The more globalized and interconnected the world becomes, it stimulates higher education institutions, organizations, and national governments to pay more attention to academic relations and opportunities with partners in other countries.

Based on the foregoing, we should put more efforts, through partnerships, more regional research and university networks, intra-regional student mobility, institutional agreements, and exchange of information on curriculum changes and quality assurance frameworks. Let us be happy to become more interconnected to achieve more.

AWAU has become an important forum for critical engagement with our colleagues and as an avenue for policy advice in the promotion of international understanding. We are now at the stage in which we must invest the utmost efforts in managing our higher educational institutions by turning this initiative into a consistent development of strategy, diversification of knowledge information and productive capacities. In such a situation, there is the need to undertake joint international action to reduce the structural distortions militating against the development of Africa in what has become an international division of labour (Nobilo:1992:218).

The increasing efforts by our members to relate progress in this region to the strategy of development and international understanding is laudable. The sharper definition of our identity in the world has been buoyed by the establishment and sustenance of this body. The co-operation that we have established from member states has further impelled us to want to do more. This is, therefore, the most auspicious time for us to address, assess and rethink the issues of quality, integration, collaboration, and technology in the tertiary education sector, coming once again after the depredations of Covid-19. We are now able to further highlight and assess the challenges and struggles that have tried to stunt the growth of our institutions. Since the AWAU was developed as an instrument of educational progress, we have continued to break new grounds, share expertise, and gain valuable insights into the latest trends and innovations in the field of education. Every single grain of ideas pooled together here provides a useable agenda for a vibrant educational sector in West Africa.

The COVID-19 Pandemic had caused severe rupture in human existence. It also had weakening effects on functional international institutions. (Akinyemi, 2022:12). In view of this, it is now imperative that AWAU must be devoted to concerns that address problems of institutional development. We should ensure a recalibration of the knowledge industry, co-existence, and livelihoods. The attendant disruptions to the global economy and society had severe implications for higher education with public and private universities affected by enrolments, brain drain, and general disillusionment. We are still reeling from the negative effects of the pandemic in different ways.

Thus, in the aftermath of the largest rupture and disruption in history caused by COVID-19, the countries of the world, parents, and students are keen to pick up the thread all over again. We have suffered great problems in research, knowledge generation and exchange, in scholarship, and innovation. Conversely, the lessons learnt from the disruption have also put us on notice to adopt innovative strategies that would prove extremely productive for our institutions.

A Generation in Motion

A major feature of the pre-Covid and post-Covid educational system is the mobile nature of the search for higher education by the present generation. This August gathering on this important theme: ‘Promoting Quality Tertiary Education in West Africa Through Collaboration, Regional Integration and Technology’ has once again shown us the urgency in tackling some of the problems militating against our collective development. It is imperative that **we should begin to cultivate new frontiers in promoting quality education** that would enhance **empowerment, employability, research, skills development, and career enhancement**. The question now is, how do we proceed to enhance the development of our institutions with some measures of confidence and effectiveness? Emerging data from the member states of Africa has shown that our higher institutions of learning are in dire straits as we continue the search for resources to build and equip 21st century-compliant institutions. But we must leverage on our past experiences to accomplish greater successes in mutual growth and development.

Tertiary education in West Africa has come a long way. By the 15th century, the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, in what is now Mali, had become a celebrated centre of learning and an organised scholastic community. It evolved into an intellectual and spiritual capital and a centre of the propagation of Islam throughout West Africa. It also became well known for learning and scholarship throughout the Muslim world. (Hunwick,1999). With 180 Koranic schools and 25,000 students, it became an important site for the development and exchange of manuscripts.(Africology, 2014:269). Sankore became well known for its significant contributions to Islamic culture and for providing texts that contributed to our understanding of the history and culture of West Africa during the period. The university equally served as a model of and contributed immensely to the modern understanding of academic studies and collaboration.

Scholars from various backgrounds and places sojourned in the university with many of them visiting from Egypt, Morocco and several other places. It left a legacy of promoting regionalisation and collaboration.

Just like their forebears, the modern universities in West Africa also became well known as exceptional avenues for intellectual growth and collaboration. With the establishment of the cradle of modern higher education in West Africa, collaboration also became a mantra. The Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone was established in 1827. It was the first university level institution and centre of modern academic scholarship and training in West Africa. This was followed by Cuttington University in Suacoco in Liberia, which was established in 1889. These institutions opened their doors widely to students and scholars from many places in West Africa and beyond. The training and intellectual nourishments that went on in these institutions provided many West African countries with the required manpower for national development.

There is no gainsaying the fact that West Africa hosts some of the most vibrant and forward-looking institutions in Africa today. As we have the very old, so we also play host to the young and newly emerging ones. The development of higher education has, therefore, put the sub-region on the world map as the home of the fastest growing universities in the world. From state-owned institutions to the faith based and individually own schools, we have continued to witness a flowering of young and vibrant institutions. Yet, despite the massive flowering of these young and vibrant institutions, they have proved inadequate for the teeming young population across the sub-region. Many of our youths have had to cross national borders in search of education.

Higher Education: Tools for Fostering Collaboration and Innovation

Given the current importance of the current knowledge revolution, we must understand the trajectory of this phenomenon and its antecedents in West African history. This presentation, therefore, looks at the social, economic, and

intellectual dimensions of tertiary education in the past, present and future of West Africa. Between 1827 and now, the sub-region has witnessed our higher institutions serving as catalysts for fostering collaboration, innovation, regional integration, and technological innovations. The countries of West Africa have over time contributed to the development of transnational education through initiatives promoting collective efforts of the public and private sectors in advancing ever-evolving expansions in the Higher Education sector.

Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, according to *West Africa* (June 10, 1977), "... pioneered the modern concept in which universities were not only seats of learning for a particular country but were instruments for fostering friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world.". That institution played that role significantly in West Africa and it is high time we visited that template to provide synergy and vitality for our institutions of learning in a more interdependent world. But before we go fully into the issues to be addressed under this theme, let us situate our conditions within a proper context that would enable us to make sense of where we are, and where we need to be in matters concerning the development of higher education in West Africa. Let us first understand our crisis of development.

The Crisis of Development

West Africa since the decade of independence has had its fair share of its vicissitudes. The bright hopes of progress envisaged at the point of independence have dimmed significantly. As intellectuals we should ensure a lucid and engaging analysis of the crisis of development staring us in the face. This is to enable us to help in the construction of the building blocks for the society of the future. The intractable challenges of energy and food crises, deteriorating ecological conditions, deficiencies in infrastructure, as well as the lack of essential inputs and services, the debt burden, foreign exchange scarcity, and other vulnerabilities- have forced many of our countries into a financial squeeze

have made several governments to shelve normal development activities, with the education sector suffering severe neglect. The consequences are obvious.

There is the spiral of growing political, economic, and social instability (Kwapong, 1992::35). Both the government and society now expect us to design durable solutions that may include alternative energies, exports, agriculture and food production, skills enhancement, and employability. Our universities should begin to sound much encouraging notes of development programmes, projects, innovation, and the world of work. The issues I have just touched on should become more pertinent to the overall theme of this conference. I hope this body can help in redefining our structures in helping to find some answers to the problems confronting our nations, and the sub-region in general. We should now engage in a deeply honest reappraisal and a realistic recalibration of the higher education sector for a more engaging future. In the final analysis, I believe many of our problems will be solved by unified action. Our faculties of agriculture and technology should work together to solve our food and energy challenges in an organised fashion and in tandem with other issues highlighted below.

Higher Education, Regionalisation and the ‘Scramble Out of Africa’

We are now in the middle of contemporary global transformations in which Higher Education and its multinational approaches have become a major force in today’s technology-driven and highly competitive global economy (Paracka, 2003:195). It is within that light that we now need answers to major questions surrounding the issues of human progress and development. If it is as I have noted elsewhere (Oloyede 2018), that ‘Universities the world over are responsible for research, knowledge generation, scholarship and innovation’, and that “they also serve as conduits for the transfer, adaptation, and dissemination of knowledge generated across the world”, then we already have our works cut out for us. Our answers lie in strengthening the international dimensions of education in West Africa. But there are major challenges. The scramble out of Africa by the younger

generations of Africans, which has now become known as *Japa*¹ in Nigeria, and their deep disillusionment with the present structures, have now made it more imperative for us to rebuild and refocus our institutions as avenues of access, development, progress, equity, and affordability.

The debacle occasioned by the massive economic downturn of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP) of the mid-1980s, the huge debt overhang, and the massive brain drain of the 1990s have left our higher educational intuitions highly retarded and severely stunted. This largely explains the complexities of the tribulations of the older universities in West Africa. They limped on until the founding of newer and vibrant ones. Even then, the present economic conditions of our countries, and the lack of opportunities for employment and upward mobility have continued to serve as disincentives for the younger generations. This has now assumed an international dimension. Thus, as we look into the issue of quality in our universities, **we should cast our eyes more significantly towards the need for employability, skills, and career enhancement.** It is in that light that I discuss the need for quick development of regionalisation and other issues below.

The Charter of the United Nations has shown an appreciation of the need for cultural, social, and economic development of the global south. In Article 1 (3) of the Charter, it affirms: ‘to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language and religion.’ (Akinyemi, 2022: 7). Our universities must key keenly into this agenda. Thus, we are expected to guarantee the most efficient utilisation of our universities’ spaces for the advancement of society – local, national, and international. The

¹ This colloquial expression is loosely translated as ‘run away’ or ‘escape’. Young people in search of the golden fleece, educational opportunities or in search of better livelihoods have latched on to this expression since 2020.

education of the future will not pay too much premium on the delimitation of frontiers or boundaries of learning. Rather, the national and international strategies to ensuring the commitment of member states will dwell more on the framework for expanding the frontiers of knowledge.

SDG 4: The Convergence of Online and Face to Face Education in the Age of Digital Technology

How ready are we for blended learning? This is a fundamental question. But that really is not the most fundamental in the short term. For us at this juncture, the need to bridge the digital divide should be addressed in the context of the SDG 4 -Education 2030 indicators (UNESCO). Some of these include access to the following: electricity; Internet for pedagogical purposes; computers for pedagogical purposes; adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities. Its ICT indicator measures ICT skills based on the number of people who reported having undertaken certain computer-related activities in a given time period. It is important, therefore, that the proportion of youths and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill should henceforth become imperative.

One of the lessons learnt from Covid-19 is that we can no longer afford to live in fantasy worlds. From now on, we must live in a world of new realities. That is the way to sustain productivity. While face to face learning is still important, we have now come to a world of Online learning. This is guaranteed to increase access by making courses and teachers available to a wide spectrum of students.

We have had unique opportunities to foster greater collaborations among researchers over time. Researchers in the arts and sciences in West African institutions have had opportunities for collaborations through seed funding for research and collaborations. Funding opportunities across the region and among researchers have been facilitated over time by different bodies and associations.

West African universities have been known as regionally engaged institutions through the expansion of knowledge, skills, and manpower. These institutions have had a dynamic history of helping to shape the sub-region's educational landscape and intellectualism. The establishment of the University of The Gambia in 1999 depended to a large extent on cooperation from Nigerian institutions. I know that several other countries here have similarly contributed manpower and other resources for the development of universities elsewhere in the sub-region. These efforts should be mainstreamed into institution and capacity building in this global age.

Innovation and Quality Assurance

We have gone ahead to stimulate the growth of higher education institutions in West Africa. These institutions have come with series of innovations and capacity to foster academic relations and opportunities for Millennials and the Gen Z. But has the growth also witnessed appropriate Quality Assurance mechanisms and oversight? In the last couple of months, news coming out of Nigeria and Benin Republic have revealed the circumvention of the good news coming out of our interconnectedness. The number of applicants into Nigeria's universities have outstripped the numbers we could cater for. This was a problem we have had to deal with year in year out. It was, therefore, a great relief when a sizable number of Nigerian students began to find accommodation in Benin Republic Schools. But a twist has been added to this in recent times.

Allegations of racketeering of degrees and fake certificates soon began to circulate in Nigeria. An undercover journalist from Nigeria recently exposed the racketeering that went on in Benin Republic and Togo on the activities of fake results syndicates in the two West African countries. Umar Audu, the undercover reporter from Daily Nigerian Newspaper succeeded in earning a university degree from the *Ecole Supérieure de Gestion et de Technologies, Cotonou*, a Benin Republic University, in six weeks (Daramola, 2024). He also succeeded in

enrolling for Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps with that degree certificate (Tyohemba, 2024.). After his investigation and the outcry that followed it, the journalist proceeded to ask the Federal Government to scrutinize all degrees that were issued to Nigerians from institutions in both Benin Republic and Togo. Consequently, on Tuesday, January 2, 2024, the Nigerian government not only suspended the evaluation and accreditation of degree certificates from the Republics of Benin and Togo, but it also went on to ban 18 other foreign universities (Ariemu 2024). That surely cannot be palatable news for those of us promoting regionalization efforts.

Now, there are calls to ban all degrees emanating from Benin institutions. One lesson we have learnt from this is that we must do due diligence on institutions within our spaces and ensure quality assurance. Already, the matter is being investigated and the affected universities are being contacted. However, no matter what happened and the fears we have, it would be unconscionable to criminalise other universities across the borders or impose collective punishments on them. This is because even within the universities being mentioned, some students could have earned their certificates legitimately. Only the guilty universities and graduates must be sanctioned and brought to book. That is why we must act collectively to ensure that universities – both public and private- within our territories follow due process in everything they do.

Equity, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination Educational Policy: A Transborder Phase

JAMB has become deeply attached to two important doctrines that will continue to define Nigeria's Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) into the future. The doctrine of inclusive access to higher education in Nigeria and the development of a framework for internationalisation of tertiary education, which found resonance in our internationalisation of admissions process. We have seemingly neglected a sizable number of our growing population from the scheme of things.

These are People Living with Disabilities (PLWD). Thus, with a better understanding of the age in which we live in, we began to take steps to correct the problems with zeal. Our educational policy should now be on that consciously addresses equity and inclusion in matters of Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD). The Curriculum of our General Studies Departments and Centres should begin to emphasise social justice, most especially in relation to People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) (Oloyede, 2023).

Our understanding to the neglect suffered by this special group led to the setting up in 2017 of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Equal Opportunity Group (JEOG). JEOG was created as a structure and one of the Standing Committees of JAMB. The JEOG was established as one of the tools needed to help society to retrace its steps in its treatment of the visually impaired and other disabled candidates.

The aim of JEOG is to facilitate better access to higher education for persons with special needs and to improve the learning environment in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Since 2017, JEOG with a membership of 42 scholars drawn from different disciplines has processed about 2,500 candidates, with over a third of them admitted for courses of their choice in higher education institutions in Nigeria. Candidates from different parts of the country had Centres created in their zones so that they would not have to travel too far from their domains. JEOG examination Centres were opened in Abuja, Enugu, Kano, and Lagos. Prison candidates were later added to the list of special candidates with centres thereafter opened in Kaduna, Kaduna State, and Ikoyi Prison in Lagos State. The number of these special centres have expanded significantly as more candidates began to be added to the list across the country (See Table 1).

Table 1**TABLE OF JEOG CENTRES FROM INCEPTION**

| 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Abuja | Abuja | Abuja | Abuja | Abuja | Abuja | Abuja |
| Enugu | Benin | Enugu | Ado-Ekiti | Ado-Ekiti | Ado-Ekiti | Ado-Ekiti |
| Kano | Enugu | Lagos | Enugu | Bauchi | Bauchi | Bauchi |
| Lagos | Kano | Kano | Kano | Benin | Benin | Benin |
| Kaduna Prison (Borstal Home) | Lagos | | Lagos | Enugu | Enugu | Enugu |
| Ikoyi Prison | Kaduna Prison (Borstal Home) | | Akure | Jos | Jos | Jos |
| | Ikoyi Prison | | Oyo | Kano | Kano | Kano |
| | | | | Kebbi | Kebbi | Kebbi |
| | | | | Lagos | Lagos | Lagos |
| | | | | Oyo | Oyo | Oyo |
| | | | | Yola | Yola | Yola |

Source: Oloyede, 2023.

Thus, since 2017, we have resolutely become committed to the inclusion of the special needs candidates on a surer path towards the development process. We have demonstrated this with the understanding of what must be done to our less-privileged people. For a national institution like JAMB to realise and sustain the critical values expected by its creators, we needed to re-position ourselves as being central to the existence and satisfaction of all our stakeholders. During the second decade of the 21st century, the management of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) took ample steps to redress the injustices and neglect suffered by the special needs candidates who had been marginalised in the scheme of access to higher education. With the physical, sensory, or intellectual impairment that limited one or the major activities of their lives, it became imperative that individuals and organisations must step in to provide the much-needed succour, support, and care to ensure their access to Higher education in the country.

There are numerous special needs students who are visually impaired, hearing impaired and several others. But let me say here that our commitment to the complementary principles of innovation and human rights have made us to develop stratagems for inclusiveness, fairness, justice, and capacity building. Through these, we have made it possible to hold residual spaces for those that the society considered as the handicapped or physically challenged. We need to replicate the same in West Africa as a cross-border instrument for our development process.

Our work and educational environment in West Africa should also now be committed to ensuring equal opportunity not only within our specific countries but also across the border. We should begin to provide educational opportunities to the people living with disabilities across the borders of West Africa. Basic amenities should be provided for them in the process of recruitment of workers and admission of students. We need to strive to adopt and advance the legally protected statuses available to us in international and national statutes and proclamations. From border to border and from country to country, we should be committed to providing an educational environment free from discrimination based on national and ethnic origins and disability. We should take care to adhere to regulations and applicable national and international laws and through that, take responsibility to comply with all applicable laws, regulations and statutes dealing with PLWD. The Office of Disaster Risk Reduction had proclaimed that Persons with Disabilities constitute 16% of the world's population, with 80% living in the Global South (UNDRR, 2023). It is imperative, therefore, that we not only protect PLWD from all forms of hazards but must act on providing equal access for them in our schools beyond our borders. To date, Nigeria has made some progress in disability inclusion. We are always happy to share experiences with universities across the sub-region.

In addition to the foregoing, a vibrant internationalisation programme is essential to the prosperity of any country's higher education system. A Committee

on Internationalisation of Admissions into Tertiary Education Institutions in Nigeria was inaugurated by JAMB on Monday, August 5, 2019. The tertiary education system in Nigeria is the largest in Africa and has become an active player in the internationalisation of education on the African continent and indeed in the world.

The chances given for academic mobility by JAMB is designed to reform and modernise curricular and pedagogy and the delivery of education to other countries in diverse forms. According to the report of a Committee Set up by JAMB on the *Internationalisation of Admissions into Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria* (2019), a survey carried out in August 2019 discovered that of the 194 institutions that responded to its enquiry, there were only 1,856 Foreign students out of a total of 1,132,795 students. The percentage of all foreign students in these institutions amounted to 0.18% in universities, 0.29% in Polytechnics and 0.04% in the Colleges of Education.

Internationalisation is characterised by several educational features, including curricular redesign, staff development, learning, teaching and assessment strategies, international cooperation, increase and efficient travel of human capital and ideas, lifelong and inclusive education, and a more democratic, fair, and equal world that places great value on lifelong learning. In tandem with the foregoing, we should take care to mainstream inclusive education, social competencies, innovation, and critical thinking. Not only did JAMB strive to promote internationalisation through the admissions process, but we also encouraged institutions to improve the quality of teaching and raise the standard of the classrooms and facilities to international levels, in the countries various institutions. JAMB also committed to providing funding for internationalisation of education to enable institutions to develop appropriate infrastructure.

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board began a process of the admission of foreign students in several universities and this approach has been supported by competitive incentives to tertiary institutions promoting

internationalisation. We are also intent on putting in place incentives for the most environmental and infrastructure-friendly campus for the physically and visually disabled students. This will encourage and grant incentives to higher institutions that encourage PLWD to come in from other countries. The education fairs undertaken abroad should also showcase the facilities and support available and functionally put in place for the disabled to attract them to Nigeria. In other words, our internationalisation programmes are being redesigned to go hand in glove with the processes of encouraging blind candidates and other special groups of candidates to study in Nigerian HEIs. We are happy to see our neighbours participating in the cross fertilisation of ideas.

With the Roadmap now created by JEOG in a document entitled *Strategic Roadmap for Inclusive Access to Quality Higher Education in Nigeria (2024-2028)*, our performance as a national institution in this regard will be greatly enhanced. We are happy to share the document with you.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Strategic Learning

How do we prepare our scholars, administrators, and students for an AI powered future? Aspects of people's work and existence are now guaranteed to change and evolve across a range of industries (Abbot, 2023)., How do we spot what is going on within the Artificial Intelligence arena and apprehend it for the education sector in an organised and orderly fashion? AI has continued to evolve. It is also guaranteed to change, affect, and influence the way we research, work, and teach. While helping us to automate, there is the need to have better insights into AI and its utility value in the present age. This is because it has the capacity to unlock enormous value for intellectual development. Although there is widespread concern about AI on ethical issues, most especially the use of ChatGPT, we should start early to help in establishing effective regulations to guide its use in our educational institutions.

The Future of Work: Expanding the Frontiers of STEAM Education

The Future of work and education have a considerable place in an ever-changing world. We have now reached a significant milestone when we must address global challenges through the instrumentalities of our knowledge industry. One way to do this is through STEAM (rather than STEM education alone) education. STEAM can be viewed as the unique approach to deploying and integrate the subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics into the learning experience. The Arts are included to the STEM mix to encourage creativity, artistic expression and design thinking providing a well-rounded and thorough approach to education. This important project, which is designed in relation to the need of the era to strengthen the educational system in Nigeria through STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) has now gone the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It is a great leap forward in Nigeria's search for sustainable development. Its implementation is guaranteed to inaugurate a revolution that should align our goals with that of the fourth Industrial revolution being witnessed around the world. I am happy that this is happening at this auspicious time.

Our current educational system is plagued with myriads of problems that militate against the realization of the Fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) of inclusive and equitable quality education required for global competitiveness in 21st century economies. Among the biggest challenges we are witnessing is the lack of a balanced curriculum, inadequate funding, outdated education model and pedagogical approaches. JAMB has intervened in the process by granting full financial and moral support for the development of STEAM education in Nigeria. The need to do this has been made obvious over time. Nobile (1992:225) stated that, “ the security of states also entails the right to development, to equal participation of states in the international division of

labour, and in the international markets of technology and capital,” J. F. Ade-Ajayi, the doyen of the Ibadan School of history had equally forewarned that both technology and culture are not mutually exclusive. He proclaimed that “respect for African traditional cultures was not antithetic to the encouragement of culture and technology.” Based on the foregoing, the time has come for us to expand our educational interventions in matters of start-ups, employability, and artificial intelligence, and indigenous knowledge.

In June 2022, my office had received a well-crafted application from the Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS) to the effect that JAMB should help in advancing the frontiers of knowledge through STEM Education. However, when the proposal went to Management, it was vigorously debated and the ultimate decision was that at this stage of our development, it is better to advance towards STEAM education. A counterproposal was sent back to NAS and this was accepted by the Executive of the Nigerian Academy of Science. Today, we are witnessing the fruitful collaboration between the Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS) and the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL). These Academies have now proposed ways to advance STEAM education at primary and secondary educational levels in Nigeria designed to contribute to improving the uptake and quality of education in Nigeria. This will be through the implementation of engaging inquiry-based teaching and learning techniques, and other hands-on activities. The intakes by our HEIs in the next couple of years will be products of this engaging initiative that will prepare them for a future of innovation and work.

Our mission now is to reduce the areas of ignorance, inferiority, and dependence. If universities in Africa are to promote development, we should promote and not inhibit cooperation in the scheme of things. We should, therefore, leverage on cooperation to work on West Africa becoming the tech hub of the continent, what with our smart boys and girls spread all over the world and driving other peoples ‘progress.

The Global Financial System and the Multiple Problems of Economic Distress and Multiple Currencies

We now need to establish top business schools that can create synergies and interactive meetings within the sub-region. The financing and funding of education in West Africa has been affected by the West African finance architecture. The consequences of this for the sector is very critical to everything we are engaged in in the sector. The direction and quantum of inflation and exchange rate stability must be studied, understood, and managed proactively.

The sub-region must move away from receiving aids. It is time to cooperate and collaborate to raise the stature of the region. Collaboration must be enhanced through education and knowledge. The faithfulness of Nigeria to enhancing our growing bond is reflected by our eagerness in the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board to confront some of the challenges witnessed in the education sector. Our internationalisation programme has helped to define the urgency of what we are doing here today.

Conclusion

The growing division and political tension happening in ECOWAS countries² should be seen as temporary setbacks. We believe that the breach will heal by and by. If education is to promote and not inhibit international understanding, development, and cooperation, we must aim at an objective appraisal of what we should benefit as a people. The pan-regional impact of AWAU must be constantly stressed and sustained. We, therefore, envision a more organic Higher Educational sector in the nearest future. Towards that end, we should be seen as an instrument for the creation of a roadmap for technological advancement, teamwork, innovation, capacity building, and strategic thinking. We should now

² Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger Republic have been in dispute with ECOWAS in recent times.

begin to leverage on our educational processes and structures to expand understanding, development, and peace efforts in the sub-region.³

In these days of global challenges and strategic thinking, we look forward to greater seasons of impressive approaches in creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork. We need to put together a Grand Strategy for a better and seamless understanding of the approaches and frameworks necessary for sustained progress in Higher Education in West Africa. That is the surest way to relate efficiently and effectively and also, allow us to establish a robust value chain in our educational sector in a competitive global world.

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