Keynote Speech by Osita Chidoka, OFR.

Chief Executive, Federal Road Safety Corp

INTRODUCTION

I am very honoured to be invited here to speak on my life's journey and on how we can all advance the development of quality education in Nigeria especially at a period when our educational vehicle is incessantly grounded by strikes, a period when the culture of reading has been reduced to blackberry pinging, a time when the social media has taken the place of classroom teaching, a time of course when educational excellence is a rare commodity. Yet, it is a time when we still have great hope to turn things around.

EDUCATION; WHAT IT MEANS. The word "education" comes from the Latin root educare which means "to lead out". Education calls for belief in what is to be shared, commitment to the ideals embraced by humanistic values, and hope for the future. One of the basic rights of every citizen is the right to education and one of the priorities of every government should be the provision of quality education that could compete globally. In any society where young people have access to quality education the type of choices they make will definitely have positive impact on the development of that nation.

In ancient Greece for example, the cradle of Western scholarship, education was a highly functional search-light beamed on society. It has a key role in developing the human input to production and supporting the development of science and technology. Educational institutions on the other hand are built to foster the acquisition of skills and knowledge as well as moral development of the learner. The Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions are designed to produce a diversified workforce for an economy in need of different types of skilled labour.

According to Harmon, Oosterbeek and Walker [2000], the more educated countries are developing faster due to the fact that the school enables the labour force to innovate new technologies and to adapt the existing ones to the local production. Consequently, the economies that are inside the technological frontiers have greater opportunities to develop faster [Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 1995].

The quality of education has an influence upon the speed with which societies become developed and the extent to which individuals can improve their own productivity. An educational system that is more effective in establishing cognitive skills to an advanced level and distributing them broadly through the population will bring stronger social and economic benefits than less effective system. This implies that more emphasis should be placed on the subject structure of the curriculum.

NIGERIA EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: REFLECTING ON PAST AND CURRENT SITUATION

Crisis in education, according to Bello Umar Gusau (2008), started manifesting itself when government went all out to implement 6-3-3-4 system without sufficient plan put in place. The primary education was the first to suffer the effect of this inadequate planning. For instance, in 1976, free Universal Primary Education was launched but the policy on education itself appeared in 1977, one year after implementation of the programme. In this kind of situation where implementation is ahead of policy, confusion is certainly bound to emerge. Moreover, needs assessment was not properly done, and the end result was absence of adequate statistical data upon which evidence based public policy could be anchored.

Evidence abound that societies where long term strategic planning are the norms, such societies naturally succeed. For instance the Nigerian economy witnessed improvements in the periods when strategic plans were implemented between 1962 and 1975 when

according to the National Planning Commission, Nigeria recorded an average GDP growth of 9.4 percent.

When compared to comparator countries like Malaysia which had forty five years of consistent strategic planning, GDP per capita in Malaysia grew from 808 US dollar to 10,345 USD by 2012. Similarly, Singapore due to forty years of consistent strategic planning grew its GDP per capita from 2,505 US dollar in 1975 to a whooping 52,052 USD in 2012. Thus in comparism to Nigeria's strategic planning limited to only fifteen years, we could only achieve a GDP per capita growth from 454 US dollar in 1975 to 1,526 USD in 2012.

Scant regards to long term strategic planning in Nigeria for example affected the Universal Primary Education (UPE). On the launching of UPE, three million children showed up as against 2.3 million originally planned for, representing a 30 percent underestimation. This has implications for classroom spaces, teachers, and equipment (Akpa 1988).

The exercise triggered phenomenal rise in pupil population from 8.7million in 1976/77 to 12.5 million in 1979/80 and reaching 15 million in 1982. Unable to sustain the scheme, the Federal Government subsequently transferred the responsibility to the State and Local Government.

The junior secondary school which was designed to make the youth employable through vocational skill acquisition could not achieve its goal due to poor implementation. For instance, while Government purchased cheaper technological products from European markets, these products became redundant due to poor power supply and lack of requisite skills for the teachers to operate the machines. Consequently, the prevocational subjects which were meant to launch Nigeria into a respectable industrialized state with abundant pool of lower level manpower became an illusion with the subjects such as introductory technology being taught theoretically as English Language.

In the â€˜70s, government took over all voluntary and mission schools on the ground of free universal primary education. Unfortunately, this reform collapsed in less than a decade.

Another effect was the relegation of the service of the Inspectorate Services who were the quality control watchdog in the education sector to limbo. No educational programme can function effectively without a quality inspectorate service. The concept of inspection has now been changed to supervision. According to Bello Umar Gusau (2008), the change is necessitated by the perception of school inspectors as no less than police inspectors with a colonial mentality. He further stressed that this was because of their perception as enforcers of discipline, and whose presence in a school was both fearsome and awesome to school teachers and administrators. The school inspectors, according to him brook no nonsense and tolerated no incompetence to duty. Despite the shortcomings of the colonial inherited inspectorate services, he said the system was by far better than what we have today.

According to John U Nwalor, the failure of our educational reforms has made Nigerians obsessed with paper qualifications rather than the outcomes and results that should emerge from such qualifications. He stated: "Education was not seen as a means for the constructive development of society but rather as the means to a larger share of the wealth of the nation - the same sentiments that ruled in national politics then and particularly still rules today, giving birth and prominence to issues and measures associated with distrust and inequity - insecurity, quota, and the principle of rotation. We had a nation founded on the merits of synergy degenerate to one where everyone literally must fend for himself minding and protecting very narrow personal interest."

According to John U Nwalor, "the educational system today has to contend with examination malpractices of various types, admissions racketeering, and records falsification and misrepresentation as well as other vices that threaten its survival. From all this, most sadly, has evolved a culture of aspiring to that which the individual is not

qualified for." Nigeria today, is suffering from development crises brought about by the distortion in our educational system and we must holistically do a review to know where we got it wrong and what could be done.

So let us look at the educational status of Akwa-Ibom and Ogun States for instance. The choice of these two states arose from their ranking in terms of the 2006 census, which ranked Akwa Ibom as number 15th and Ogun state immediately next at number 16th.

THE CASE OF OGUN AND AKWA-IBOM STATE

Akwa-Ibom according to the 2006 Census by the National Population Commission is a state with a population of 3,920,208 exceeding that of Ogun State by 192,110, which has 3,728,098. There are some similarities between Akwa Ibom and Ogun state; they both are states in Nigeria, they have Governors and State Houses of Assembly. Since return to democracy in 1999, Akwa Ibom state has been governed by the PDP for fourteen years, while Ogun state have been governed by PDP for eight years and AD/ACN/APC for six years.

Then the differences begin. In 2010, while Ogun state had an estimated GDP of $10 billion, Akwa-Ibom state within the same period was estimated to have a GDP of $11 billion. The Akwa Ibom GDP of $11 billion literarily translated to the state having an economy larger than that of at least 30 African countries including Gambia, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Sao Tome and Principe.

In addition, between January and December, 2012, Akwa Ibom state received N217, 776,188,886.07 thereby making it the highest beneficiary of the statutory and VAT allocation. Ogun state on the other hand received N68, 975,959.69 within the same period.

In terms of budgeting, while in 2012, Akwa-Ibom budgeted the sum of N533.113 billion, Ogun state budgeted the sum of 200.55 billion. This simply means that Akwa Ibom budget in 2012 was 166% larger than that of Ogun state. Also, Akwa Ibom in the 2012 appropriation budgeted the sum of N19.6 billion for education. This sum represented about 4% of the year's appropriation. Ogun state on the other hand in the 2012 appropriation budgeted N42.4 billion or 21% of her budget for education. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2009 report, while the total numbers of public primary schools in Ogun were 1,921, which served 388,930 pupils, the number of public primary schools in Akwa-Ibom state were 1,146 but served 243,079 pupils. The NBS 2012 report indicated that, while Ogun state had three hundred and thirty two public secondary schools, there were six hundred and eight public secondary schools in Akwa-Ibom state. The 608 public secondary schools in Akwa-Ibom enrolled 110,003 applicants within that year, while the 332 public secondary schools in Ogun state absorbed 151,478 applicants.

One would naturally assume that based on the comparatively higher population figure of Akwa-Ibom, it would have more Universities, but the case is not so. Rather, while according to the National University Commission (NUC) there are eleven Universities in Ogun state, Akwa Ibom has only four Universities. Given that Universities are centers of excellence and research centers, mere presence of a University in a community presupposes access to innovation, critical thinking and activation of problem solving mode.

In 2012, while the available higher institutions in Akwa-Ibom were able to absorb only 1,469 students, the higher institutions in Ogun state offered admission to 3,132 applicants, representing an amazing 72.28 percentage difference in number of enrolment into tertiary institutions in Ogun over Akwa Ibom state.

And in terms of performance, even though no University in the two states of Ogun and Akwa Ibom ranked within the top 10 universities according to the National University

Commission 2011 ranking of Nigerian Universities, the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta ranked 11th while University of Uyo ranked a distance 21st. In another development it should be a source of concern that no secondary school in Akwa Ibom state have ever ranked within the league of the top ten secondary schools in Nigeria.

The differences in the educational pursuits between the two states therefore imparted on the two states as shown in the employment index. While the unemployment index in Ogun according to the NBS 2009 record stood at 8.5%, that of Akwa-Ibom was 34.1%. Still using the annual report of the National Bureau of Statistics, the 2012 NBS report indicated that Akwa Ibom state in 2011 had a projected HIV population of 236,285, second only to Benue with a HIV projected population of 260,288. Ogun state 2011 projected HIV population was only 55,902. In the same 2012 NBS report, while Akwa Ibom in 2011 had only 176 medical doctors and 5 dentists, Ogun for instance had 379 medical doctors and 15 dentists.

The afore mentioned therefore brought to the fore that education remains the key tool to building a formidable economy and positioning the wider populace towards making informed social and economic decisions. It must be emphasized and strongly too that, even though access to financial resources could aid or facilitate a society's path to greatness, the sure and reliable way to greatness is through knowledge and innovation.

The danger here is that even though Akwa Ibom state is financially more sufficient than Ogun state, judging from its financial accruals,. if urgent steps are not taken to improve the educational system in Akwa- Ibom State, it would not be well positioned to compete favourably, not only in Nigeria but globally. What this means is that by the year 2020, when Nigeria is projected to be within the league of the twenty global economies, there will be a wide economic and educational gap between those of Akwa-Ibom and Ogun state.

This underscores the fact that no state can achieve sustainable economic growth and development without significant investment in human capital. Education improves the quality of the people's lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education increases the people's productivity and ingenuity as well as promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In also plays a very vital role in securing economic, social advancement and efficient income distribution. For, Akwa Ibom to enjoy economic prosperity, it must invest more in the educational sector.

Permit me to share with you few examples of how investment in education can truly advance a society.

CHINA EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

China has made huge strides in educating its population. During the Cultural Revolution, educated people, including teachers, were sent to rural areas to work in the fields. Before then, the teaching force was effectively destroyed. But today after three decades, parts of China - notably Shanghai - are among the contenders for top spots on the world's education league tables.

In 1986, China enacted the Law of Compulsory Education, which required every child to complete nine years of formal schooling - six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school. By the mid-1990s, it had basically achieved this goal.

The main lessons to learn from this experience include government's abandonment of a system built around "key schools" for a small elite and its development of a more inclusive system in which all students are expected to perform at high levels; greatly raising teacher pay and upgrading teacher standards and teacher education; reducing the emphasis on rote learning and increasing the emphasis on deep understanding with

ability to apply knowledge to solving new problems and thinking creatively. All of these are reflected in deep reforms in the curriculum and examinations.

These changes have been accompanied by greater curricular choice for students and more latitude for local authorities to decide on examination content, which in turn is loosening the constraints on curriculum and instruction.

Between 1990 to the present day, China has passed the stage of quantitative expansion in basic education with a net enrolment of 99.4 percent at the primary school level, the envy of many countries. The gross enrolment ratio for junior secondary school was 99 percent.

In 1990, the gross enrolment at senior secondary level, both general and vocational, was 79.2 percent. The general (i.e. academic) senior secondary schools enrolled 52.5 percent of students at this level, putting about half of senior high school students in the academic stream. In most urban areas, gross enrolment at the senior secondary school level is 100 percent or above, which means that the number of students enrolled exceeds the number in the appropriate age group.

China also has a unique case in higher education development. For instance, in 2010, it achieved a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 30 per cent in higher education, up from an abysmally low 3-4 per cent in 1990. The country has grown its higher education sector primarily with the help of universities, which number more than 2,300. The 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) taken by 65 economies worldwide showed that Shanghai scored number one in the world in all three subjects; Maths literacy, reading literacy and science literacy, beating the previous top scoring nation, Finland. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international study that was launched by the OECD in 1997. It aims at evaluating education systems worldwide in every three years by assessing 15- year-olds' competencies in the key subjects: reading, mathematics and sciences. The assessment

provides the world's most extensive and rigorous set of international surveys assessing the knowledge and skills of secondary school students. To date over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA.

LESSONS FROM CHINA

Shanghai became a major industrial centre under the government of the People's Republic, and later, at the opening of China. It moved on to become the city with the most remarkable development in the service sector. China felt the need for fundamental reforms of its educational system. The reform in Shanghai was part of a national undertaking. Shanghai belongs to an organised society and approached education reform in an organised way. It would be inaccurate to describe the Shanghai reform as top-down, because unmistakable and remarkable initiatives emerged from the grassroots. However, the municipal government did not only design the reform but also effectively intervened in the process, for example in running schools and improving teaching.

FINLAND, A DISTINCT EXAMPLE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Finland is one of the world's leaders in the academic performance of its secondary school students, a position it has held for the past decade. This top performance is also remarkably consistent across schools. Finnish schools seem to serve all students well, regardless of family background, socio-economic status or ability.

Since the publication of the first PISA results in 2001, Finland is now seen as a major international leader in education. It has consistently ranked in the very top tier of countries in all PISA assessments over the past decade, and its performance has been especially notable for its remarkable consistency across schools. No other country has so

little variation in outcomes between schools, and the gap within schools between the top and bottom-achieving students is extraordinarily modest as well. For these reasons, Finnish schools have become a kind of tourist destination, with hundreds of educators and policy makers annually travelling to Helsinki to try to learn the secret of their success.

LESSONS FROM FINLAND

For all of Finland's perceived advantages of size, relative cultural homogeneity, and (in recent years) economic strength, it is important to remember that as recently as 1970 only 30% of Finnish adults had completed upper secondary school, and as recently as 1993 Finland was in near economic collapse. Finland's ascent into the very top tier of educational performance was by no means inevitable: it was at least as much the result of a set of policy decisions deliberately taken, implemented thoughtfully, and sustained over a very long period of time as of factors endemic to the country's culture and history.

One of the striking things about Finland's reform story is that the political consensus achieved 50 years ago - that children should be educated together in a common school system - has remained intact across numerous changes of government. Many countries pay lip-service to the importance of attracting and retaining a high-quality teacher force, but few have pursued this goal as single- mindedly as Finland.

Finland has managed to make teaching the single most desirable career choice among young Finns through a combination of raising the bar for entry into the profession and granting teachers greater autonomy and control over their classrooms and working conditions than their peers enjoy elsewhere. Accountability clearly matters in Finland, but it is almost entirely a professional model of accountability. The strongest manifestation of that accountability can be seen in the degree to which Finnish schools are organised to take collective responsibility for struggling learners. Finnish teachers are trained to identify children who are having difficulty and to intervene before these children get

discouraged and fall too far behind their classmates. The fact that every school has a specially trained intervention specialist - the special teacher- means that the regular classroom teacher has easy access to support and that struggling children are much less likely to go unnoticed or to fall through the cracks.

LESSONS FROM THE US

The United state was certainty founded on innovation and competitiveness. Educational Institutions are ranked on certain parameters with schools ranking the best in each state made to compete nationally to determine their national score. The rankings are based on many factors, but the high school must produce measurable academic outcomes across a large number of important academic indicators. In addition, a great public high school will have a good reputation with recruiting colleges and be highly ranked in measures of student satisfaction and faculty quality. The first step in the ranking process analyzes whether each school's students perform in the top echelons in academics for a given U.S. high school cohort. ACT scores, SAT scores, average weighted GPA, and the API (Academic Performance Index) are used as a proxy for the educational environment within a high school. The second criterion used to evaluate the public high schools is the degree to which they prepare each student in the high school community to enter and excel at college. The number and breadth of AP courses offered, Honours courses, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, and relationships with local colleges are major factors in determining the level of academic preparedness for college. The third aspect of schools assessed consists of intangible factors, such as innovative degree programs in the arts, diversity of the student body, current student satisfaction with their high school, quality and experience of the faculty, or modern lab or athletic facilities. For instance in 2012, while the School Without Walls High School ranked 1st within District of Columbia in US, the school national ranking was 266th. Students of the School Without Walls High School have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement course work and exams. The

AP participation rate at School Without Walls High School was 95 percent. School for the Talented and Gifted ranked the 1st in Boston as well as obtaining the 1st national rating of schools in the US. The School for the Talented and Gifted follows the state's Distinguished Achievement Program, and places an emphasis on Advanced Placement curriculumâ€"a minimum of 11 AP courses are required for graduation. Students at the School for the Talented and Gifted may conduct field research via partnerships with local universities and take electives such as Web mastery. It is not too surprising that the School for the Talented and Gifted ranked the 1st in Boston as well as obtaining the 1st national rating of schools in the US. This may not be unconnected with the location of the school in Boston, having proximity to where the top ranking Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) are also located in Boston, Massachusetts.

SINGAPORE A COUNTRY OF RAPID EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT AND HIGH PERFORMANCE

Singapore is one of Asia's great success stories, transforming itself from a developing country to a modern industrial economy in one generation. During the last decade, Singapore's education system has remained consistently at or near the top of most major world education ranking systems.

From Singapore's beginning, education has been seen as central to building both the economy and the nation. The objective was to serve as the engine of human capital to drive economic growth. The ability of the government to successfully match supply with demand of education and skills is a major source of Singapore's competitive advantage. Other elements in its success include a clear vision and belief in the centrality of education for students and the nation; persistent political leadership and alignment between policy and practice; a focus on building teacher and leadership capacity to deliver reforms at the school level; ambitious standards and assessments; and a culture

of continuous improvement and future orientation that benchmarks educational practices against the best in the world.

When Singapore became independent in 1965, it was a poor, small (about 700 km2), tropical island with few natural resources, little fresh water, rapid population growth, substandard housing and recurring conflict among the ethnic and religious groups that made up its population. At that time there was no compulsory education and only a small number of high school and college graduates and skilled workers. Today, Singapore is a gleaming global hub of trade, finance and transportation. Its transformation "from third world to first" in one generation is one of Asia's great success stories (Lee, 2000). All children in Singapore receive a minimum of 10 years of education in one of the country's 360 schools.

Singapore's students were among the top in the world in mathematics and sciences on the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007. They came fourth in literacy in the 2006 progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Their excellence is further underlined by the fact that Singapore was one of the top-performing countries in the 2009 PISA survey, the first PISA survey in which it participated. Singapore was rated as one of the best performing education systems in a 2007 McKinsey study of teachers (Barber and Mourshed, 2007), and was rated first in the 2007 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook (IMD, 2007) for having an education system that best meets the needs of a competitive economy.

The growth of the global knowledge economy required a paradigm shift in Singapore's education system towards a focus on innovation, creativity and research. A key instrument as Singapore intentionally navigated towards the global knowledge economy has been the government Agency for Science, Technology and Research. At the school level, Singapore created a new educational vision, "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation". This major milestone in Singapore's education journey recognised Prime Minister Goh

Chok Tong's belief that "A nation's wealth in the 21st century will depend on the capacity of its people to learn"

> ***"Thinking Schools represented a vision of a school system that can develop creative thinking skills, lifelong learning passion and nationalistic commitment in the young. Learning nation is a vision of learning as a national culture, where creativity and innovation flourish at every level of society"*** - (Lee et al., 2008).

LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE

Singapore is both a "rapid improver" and a "continuing high performer". If we believe that large-scale change in educational performance is not possible, Singapore has shown several times over that significant change is possible. Singapore has developed a high-quality system in terms of educational retention, quality and efficiency. To become and remain high-performing, countries need a policy infrastructure that drives performance and builds the capacity for educators to deliver it in schools. Singapore has developed both. Where Singapore is today is no accident. It is the result of several decades of judicious policy and effective implementation. On the spectrum of national reform models, Singapore's is both comprehensive - the goal has been to move the whole system - and public policy-driven.

THE KOREAN EXAMPLE

Making education an important issue for a country is critical for an outcome in school. In Nigeria, for instance, it used to be that passing the National Common Entrance Examination or gaining University admission was a matter for celebration in the whole neighbourhood. Today, education has been relegated to the periphery of our society; students can no longer identify the importance of education in a society where University students could stay home for four months over ASUU strike without any impact on the economy or in the wider society.

Consider the situation in Korea,, where according to Amanda Ripley, during a national test, the Korean Electric Power Corporation would send its men to monitor the power supply to the schools, to avoid disruption. The stock market would delay opening for one hour to avoid chaotic congestion of students trooping to write their exams. Taxis would give students free rides; and Police Officers would be mobilised to patrol the school premises to discourage motorists from honking their horns to disturb students. During the English language listening portion of the test, airplanes are grounded to prevent noise from disturbing the students. For a country that does these to its students to give education the kind of attention it deserves, are we surprised that Korea is a leader in the PISA test?

THE LESSON FROM POLAND

In 1997, in a new book by Amanda Ripley, titled, "Smartest Kids," in the World and how they got that way, Poland appointed Miroskaw Handke as Education Minister, an outsider, a chemist by profession and an accomplished one at that but one that knew next to nothing about education or education policy. At the time he took over, Poland faced an existential crisis in which only half of rural adults finished primary school. Poland was relegated to low skilled and low paid jobs other Europeans did not want to do. He

then embarked on an ambitious education Reform Programme that had four main points:

First, inject rigour into the system. The new programme mould fundamentally layout goals, but leave details to school and government which require a quarter of the teachers to go back school to school to improve the system. Secondly, accountability - students would start taking standardized test at regular intervals through their schooling. The third reform was adding an extra full year in high schools, delaying graduation from high school to age sixteen.

Fourthly, autonomy - teachers would be free to chose their text books and curriculum from the over one hundred approved curriculum and earn bonuses on how much development they did. The reform was bold in conception and novel but met stiff resistance from entrenched interest in the education industry, yet the minister persisted. In year 2000, three years after the programme, polish student, fifteen old took the PISA exams and ranked 21st in reading and 20th in Maths, below the United State and below the OECD average for the developed world. A very poor out come. In 2003, a new group of polish took PISA. This is now six years after the reform and the result was interesting. Poland ranked 13th in reading and 18th in Maths just above the US in both subjects. In space of three years, Poland had caught up with the developed world. This was a surprising out come in that reforms normally take many years to have impact, but this clearly showed that a clear minded reform can produce outcomes if properly focused in a short time.

GOING FORWARD

The Future of Nigerian Education educational system must be built on existing foundations by improving on those structures and at every level we need to focus on

areas for improvement using national and international metrics to measure performance.

I am delighted that this award ceremony for excellence is a wake up call for us to reinvent the public schools that can front leap Akwa Ibom state into the league of global competiveness that is the hallmark of the present information age. Certainly the map of oil is changing, therefore Akwa Ibom must invest more in the education of the future generations. This will then make us confident that their tomorrow is fully assured and prosperous. The ongoing transformation in the state requires conscious strategic planning that would produce a generation of educated, well skilled, and competent manpower that would not only sustain the ongoing progress but cause quantum improvement in positioning Akwa Ibom and Nigeria as the pride of the black race.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that in advancing the development of quality education in Akwa Ibom state there is need to:

- Set up an independent committee made up of experts in the education sector to study the existing educational policy of the state and come up with workable strategies that will transform the educational sector in Akwa Ibom
- Considering international metrics, education experts should debate how new curricula and assessment strategies can enhance the relevance and impact of learning.
- Develop a rigorous, research-based teacher-education programmes that prepares teachers in content, pedagogy, and educational theory, as well as the capacity to do their own research and craft creative academic solutions for teaching;
- Evolve an educational policy that incentives attendance of public schools, which can compete better than products of private schools. One of the ways to achieve this is to recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals,

while developing a reliable data base capable of measuring students success and feedback teachers on their performance while exploring smarter procedures for improving teaching.

- Create a significant financial support for teacher education, professional development, reasonable and equitable salaries, and supportive working conditions. This would include granting long term loans to teachers which are written off based on their continued employment as teachers up to ten or more years after attracting the loan facilities.

- Factor the measurement of the impact of teachers and their teaching as a major parameter in the ranking of schools.

- There should also be a policy on continuous tracking of student's performance, especially those that did well in their JAMB and pre degree examinations to see the correlation to their final academic performance at graduation, to see if consistencies are maintained. This would certainly foster the spirit of continuing high performer.

- Reforming school curriculum by increasing the emphasis on deep understanding with ability to apply knowledge to solving new problems and thinking creatively rather than narrowing performance to written examinations, which sometimes make students to memorise only for purpose of passing examinations.

- Designing flexible educational programms with flair for greater curricular choice for students and more latitude for authorities at the local communities to decide on examination content, aimed at loosening the constraints on curriculum and instruction.

- Commence a conscious progamme that would present students of Akwa Ibom public schools to participate and excel in internationally known educational rating

programmaes, especially the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

- Build a sense of shared understanding and common purpose among key stakeholders and groups in order to achieve system coherence and continuity.

CONCLUSION

To improve the quality of our education, we need to study what other countries did that made a positive difference in their educational system and remodel it to suite our own system. Just recently, the United States President, Barack Obama launched one of the world's most ambitious education reform agendas called, "race to the top." The agenda encourages US states to adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments as a framework within which they can prepare students for success in college and the workplace; recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals; build data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and turn around their lowest-performing schools.

The world today is a global village. If we must make education the foundation of our future, if we must create knowledge based - economy; then we must orient ourselves with what other countries have done to beat the global standard. We must make a quantum leap in restructuring our educational system from being a mere box for students gathering to citadel of innovation and value. As drivers of Nigerian future economy, you are not only competing within the blue waters of our national sea but against the global ocean current.

Akwa- Ibom then under the Calabar Kingdom was among the first in the country to have a taste of western education in Nigeria with the establishment of Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar as far back as in the 1895 and the Methodist Boys High School, Oron in

1905. As a land of promise, it is time for Akwa-Ibom to reclaim its pride of place in the educational arena. By shifting your paradigm towards this line of thought and through concerted efforts from the parents, teachers and the government, I have no doubt in my mind that the educational system should be able to transform into a world class model, producing enviable graduates capable of creating an emerging economy that will compete globally, while Akwa Ibom - the state of promise remain a society where no man is oppressed.

Thank you for listening.