

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN A 'SEASON OF ECONOMIC AND MORAL DECAY'.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY UDOM INOYO AT THE 19TH/20TH CONVOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF UYO, NOVEMBER 21, 2014

Protocol:

I want to, first of all, thank the University's management for inviting me to speak at this convocation ceremony. I must confess that I was a bit surprised by the invitation, since, as you probably know, it is not the norm for public institutions in Nigeria to look outside government circles for persons to perform such a role.

Secondly, let me congratulate the students who are graduating today into a new phase of life. Some of you have been here for much longer than you expected to spend in the university, through no fault of yours. This is simply a feature of the uncertainties that have engulfed our higher education sector. I congratulate you all the same, for your doggedness in finishing the race. But let me quickly remind you that this is just one lap in the race of life which everyone is expected to run. I will return later to address you specifically on this issue.

I must acknowledge all parents and guardians who are here today to honour their sons, daughters and wards. I admire your enormous sacrifices and contributions to the education of your children and wards which have made this day possible.

I cannot fail to appreciate our faculty members. I reckon that it must be a daunting task to be an academic in a Nigerian university today. You do not need to look further than objectively examine some of the issues in contention whenever the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarks on strike.

Let me make a second confession. I was intrigued by the choice of the topic given to me -- ***'Nigeria's Education in a Season of***

Economic and Moral Decay: the way forward. Although it came with the suggestion that I could modify it, there was a caution that I should not fail to address the travails of the Nigerian education system. Since I am mindful that this is a graduation speech, and the students must be recognized and celebrated, I have adjusted the topic slightly so that, while focusing on the graduating students, we will not lose sight of the expectations of the university.

Many questions agitated my mind as to why the University would be interested in this topic in the first instance. What does the university management stand to gain from having these issues examined in a public sphere? Having no insight from the invitation letter, I can only speculate: could it be that this University is determined to confront these challenges with or without external help? Or, has the University management already commenced action and is now looking for more advocates? Whatever the intent, I think this topic is apt, given the current challenges that confront our education sector. Whatever the motivation, I must salute your courage in throwing these issues open for discussion, given my conviction that neither the University authorities nor any of the other internal and external stakeholders can do it alone. You need more supporters.

Let me begin by examining the key elements in the topic so that we can define the context of our discourse. If you Google the word "moral", you will find the following synonyms associated with it -- to be **ethical, honest, decent or honorable**. "Decay", according to the Oxford Dictionary, means to '**deteriorate, rot or decompose; or fall into disrepair**'. Consequently, in the context of the subject matter of our discourse, we could say that a season of economic and moral decay would, among other things, connote declining quality of life, shrinking economic opportunities and our society's retreat from what is ethical, right, honest, decent and honorable. It speaks of an era in which our education sector is in a comatose state if not a state of total collapse.

Reflecting on the education sector in a state of economic and moral decay, I would like to recall the thought-provoking summation of John U. Nwalor, to jump-start our discussion. Hear him: **"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."**

Again, ***Thisday*** newspaper's (September 30, 2013 Pages A1-A7) study on the state of our universities provides a classic illumination of the problem. The paper carried a report of an investigation by a team of journalists, led by Collins Edomaruse, on the state of our public universities and provided facts and figures to illustrate the crisis. That report was titled: **"This is your university!"** The pictures told the story of decrepit, derelict and cramped hostels, messy environment, acute shortage of basic amenities and faculty, and inadequate and decaying infrastructure. It was a show of shame! In one of the schools, the conclusion was damning: **'the hostels are in a terrible state of decay, without windows and ceilings caving in. The toilets are best fit for the use of animals. Most parents will withdraw their children from the hostels if they see the horrible conditions in which they live'**. The report's conclusion on the root of the problem was revealing but also aligned with Nwalor's submission that:

'Education is 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.

In a nutshell, the reporters from *Thisday* newspaper concluded that every institution visited and everyone talked to, had a common theme -- **they are witnessing an explosion in student enrolment numbers, aging facilities, neglect over the years and most especially, inadequate funding.** I want to add that **the picture painted above is merely a symptom of a major malaise facing our society. If we concentrate only on the symptoms without diagnosing the problem, our intervention can at best be superficial.**

With this in mind, what I intend to do next is to sketch an outline of what, in my opinion, are some of the critical factors responsible for the economic and moral decay in our society giving birth to the decline in our education sector. In doing so, I will examine the role of the critical stakeholders (parents, government, university management, teachers, students and others) in either the promotion of values for the enhancement of the sector or the decadence in the sector.

Departure from Core Values of our Society

Let me begin with the Biblical injunction that 'the truth will set us free.' I personally believe that it is only in telling ourselves a few home truths and accepting the reality of our situation that we can commence the journey of true healing and redemption for the nation.

I want to suggest that at the heart of the economic and moral decay in our society is the steady but unmitigated departure from what we used to stand for as a people. We used to pride ourselves as a hardworking, honest and caring people who prefer our good name to ill-gotten wealth. We used to believe in what is right, what is fair and what is just and reasonable. But not anymore!

I did commend the parents/guardians for their sacrifices in investing in the education of their children, which makes our gathering here today possible. They deserve that commendation. But if truth must be told, investing in the education of our children is probably the easy piece. This, to most parents, only requires making financial contributions. In my view, **educating a child takes more than paying fees. This is one job without retirement. The more arduous and enduring task is to commit to inculcate the right values in our children.** The Holy Book enjoins us in Proverbs 22: 6 to “**train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it**”. In this regard, permit me to say that some parents may have abandoned their number one responsibility, and inadvertently set these young ones up for failure in life. These days, what you see or hear some parents do is not just mind boggling, it is plainly unconscionable. Many parents go to any length to circumvent all rules and decency to make their children get ahead. What moral authority do we have over children for whom we have to influence their admission, pay someone to sit for their examinations and or bribe and intimidate lecturers to award undeserved grades to them?

Ladies and gentlemen, the saddest part is that we do these things with so much ease and sense of normalcy that we no longer feel any shame.

I suppose that I have been lucky in life in this regard. My parents set very clear expectations of what was right or wrong. They scrutinized everything we had and some may consider it ridiculous that even as a graduate worker, and with my father as pensioner, he would refuse to accept a N3000 gift from me as he considered it above my income. This was in 1987. When I explained to him that, as the Administrative/Protocol officer attached to the Governor in the State Liaison office in Lagos, it was not unusual to have tips from the Governor whenever he visited; he resorted to querying what sub-head the Governor will charge such expenses to. I wonder how many sub-heads he would be looking for across

our Ministries, Departments and Agencies today. My father had retired as an accomplished civil servant, having risen to the pinnacle of his career as a Permanent Secretary. That is why, when he died, it was very easy for us to have as his epitaph the following; 'here lies a man of faith and servant of God, he stood for what was right even if it meant standing alone'.

Let me be very clear -- this is not about self-righteousness; it is about accepting the reality of our situation. Let me say it loud and clear: No society can ever make progress on the foundation of fraud and deceit. As a people, we cannot be any different!

A few years ago, a very 'responsible' and educated man came to seek favors from me. He was qualified for what he wanted and only needed me to put in a word with the person in authority whom he claimed he 'helped' to win 'elections'. When I prodded him for further and better particulars of the help, it became evident that the "help" he rendered was in providing his residence to be used for some 'inappropriate election activity'. Given that election days in Nigeria are work-free days, I prodded further if his sons were at home to witness the 'help' he rendered. Needless to say, he got the message and realized that he did not set a good example for his children. On top of that, he never got the favor that he wanted.

How do our teachers fare? **Many teachers are not ennobling examples in setting the moral compass for their students and society.** The culture of "sorting", a new lingo which means financial inducement for unmerited grades and sexual harassment of students, is alien to our core values and sets the foundation for the decay in our society. If hard work no longer counts in achieving excellent results, what signals are we sending to these students? I wonder how many lecturers today will award a failed grade to their good friends or the children of their good friends who do not do well in their courses so that they would have to retake those courses. That is what my Commercial law lecturer, a

good friend, did to me. His decision did not in any way affect our relationship. Instead, he taught me a valuable lesson and almost 30 years later, he still has my highest regards.

Some lecturers have destroyed the lives of many students who refuse to give in to their demands. I recently met this woman, who now resides in Germany. When she realized that I was from Akwa Ibom State, she narrated to me her experience when she studied in this school many years ago. She was brazenly harassed by one of her lecturers and eventually had to withdraw from school. Though she is today successful, there is no doubt that she still carries that pain and the memories of her ordeal. I wonder how that lecturer would feel if their paths were to cross today. This practice must stop. I however understand that the current regime in UNIUYO has done a lot to stem this malaise and through a fair hearing process, erring lecturers and administrative staff have been sanctioned. However, I advocate that we go beyond internal discipline of offenders. The culprits should be prosecuted in a court of law while the mainstream and online media should help raise public consciousness so that we can rid it off from our campuses. There should be a process to ensure that such morally depraved lecturers who are dismissed from one university are not employed in other universities

For the managers of our education sector, can we say with a straight face that the funds allocated for the improvement of infrastructure are judiciously used? If it is, why do we have the state of absolute squalor in our educational institutions? Why do uncompleted buildings litter our campuses? Why are our libraries not stocked with up-to-date books and reference materials? Why are the students cramped in very unsuitable and inhospitable hostels? I can go on and on.

For the government officials who allocate and release budgets, can we also vouch that all the allocations meant for education are released for educational purposes? A few years ago there

were instances of bribe-for-budgets allegations and some senior government officials lost their jobs.

For the students themselves, do we make judicious use of the resources provided for us? Do we treat our university as if it is 'our house'? What about the wanton destruction of infrastructure and resources that occurred in this university on June 12, 2013 when even students' academic records and other vital and irreplaceable resources meant for the accreditation of courses were burnt?

What about places of worship? The situation is so bad that even the place of worship which ought to pass on the right values to our children is now the butt of jokes by comedians. **A preacher is recognized not so much by the number of souls transformed but by the number of jets in his fleet of private jets. Worshippers are recognized not by acts of piety but by how much money they donate to places of worship. It matters not that the money may be stolen.** The craze for wealth and ostentatious lifestyle among the messengers of salvation is such that, at times, the message is lost, and God's name is dragged in the mud!

What am I saying? **My point is that we are all guilty. The critical institutions of society (the home, the school and the church) that should help to set the right moral compass for society have failed!** Need we wonder why evil is walking tall in our society today and why everything is in a state of decay? Usman Dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto caliphate, once said that **'the crown of a leader is his integrity, his stronghold is his impartiality; and his wealth is the prosperity of his people.'** If he was to be around today, I am certain he would not recognize the society he left behind.

The President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, got it right when he noted during the 2014 National Honours' Award Ceremony a few weeks ago, that **"A nation is void and soulless if she does not have those**

sacred values it holds dear and individuals who project them. It is in such men and women that you find the authentic inheritance of the generations and their nurturing. That is why a nation is poor that is not rich in people who carry noble values that are transferred from generation to generation.”

He hit the nail on the head when he observed that: “... **one of the reasons why our society is not at ease is because we have neglected our ennobling traditional value system. There was a time in our country when, if you were honored with traditional or religious titles in any community, you were deemed to personify the highest ethos of that community. It was a period when a teacher was the hallmark of the most honourable values in a settlement. The Bank Manager in any community was a man of high probity in whose care people trusted their money. It was a period when people kept quiet and walked gently when they approached a place of worship for the fear of God in their heart, not now that people throw explosives in places of worship.”**

The solution lies in going back to the basics, the cherished values which served as the foundation of our society. The President, once again, noted: “We must get back to those time-honoured values that shaped us for good so that we can live right.” Indeed, we must not only pontificate on this, we must also walk the talk if we want things to change for the better in our society!

It is very easy to continue to complain that Nigeria is not working. However, if every one of us does a deep introspection, and if we are willing to admit the truth, we will recognize what I would refer to as “**collective culpability**” in the problems facing us today either by our act of commission or omission. We must not fail to recognize that if each of us plays his/her role -- by doing what is right always -- things will change for the better.

Also, since ultimately, the foundation to sound moral upbringing rests with the family, today, I urge our parents and guardians:

when you get back home, try to have a conversation with your son/daughter, or ward. Begin by admitting your own failings. Avoid being critical but show love while providing the right guidance. Dr. Joanne Stern, the author of the highly acclaimed book, ***Parenting Is a Contact Sport: 8 Ways to Stay Connected to Your Kids for Life***, reminds us that what another person believes about you will likely become a self-fulfilling prophecy – for better or for worse. You will outperform if someone influential in your life believes you can do it. You will underperform if that person thinks you will underperform. It is called the “Pygmalion effect”. So, if you feel today that your child's grades did not measure up, don't give up on him or her. If you also suspect that the grades were not properly earned, do not play the ostrich and be pretentious. Have a conversation and seek for a change. Our generation wasted its opportunity but I believe that these young minds can turn things around for the country if they are encouraged.

THE CELEBRATION OF A CULTURE OF LAWLESSNESS AND IMPUNITY

Ladies and gentlemen, I have also observed that the promotion of a culture of lawlessness and impunity is one other factor responsible for the economic and moral decay in our society. In this country, in my own lifetime, I have witnessed where the guilty was punished and the honest one celebrated. We had some norms in the society where a person who went against acceptable standards of behaviour was punished to send a message to other members of the society. The whole idea behind ‘trial by ordeal’, where law breakers were publicly named, paraded and shamed, although no longer acceptable in modern society, was meant to demonstrate society's total abhorrence for of such practices as stealing, murder, rape and other vices in our society. Today, sadly, although we have many laws against criminal conducts such as stealing, corruption, murder, etc., hardly does anyone get punished for committing any crime. The bane of our society and the reason for the economic backwardness of our dear nation has been traced to corruption in high and low places.

Corruption is so pervasive that there is hardly any stratum of society that is immune to it. To obtain a simple thing such as an academic transcript from most universities, one has to pay a bribe to officials in the Records Office responsible for issuing the document.

There is so much stealing in the land that one may be forgiven if one thinks that stealing has been legitimized. Yet, despite setting up institutions to fish out and punish the corrupt, such institutions are highly compromised while corruption has become endemic. People kill and maim others with reckless abandon without being brought to book. How many unsolved murders have we witnessed in our life time? It is not that the killers or those who loot the common patrimony are unknown. They are those being celebrated and given chieftaincy titles and national honours today.

The laws of the land are meant to protect the weak and the strong. How can we make progress as a nation when those who trample on the law of the land are not punished to serve as a deterrent to others? Let me make myself clear, I am not proposing a return to trial by ordeal. My point is, if we fail to punish the lawbreakers, we are only emboldening criminal elements in the society to engage in more heinous crimes, like the inexcusable and criminal abduction of over 200 of our young girls in Chibok (Borno State), the desecration of our places of worship, and the profanity of sacking judges from the court room.

There is a reason why the woman in the statue of justice is veiled.

Justice is supposed to be blind. The judge is expected to discharge justice without fear or favour, not minding who is before it. In our dear country, the veil on the statue of justice has been pierced; criminal elements who appear before our courts can actually buy justice. Have you not observed some uncanny attempts to escape justice in this country? You will see a man or woman being hailed as a success story. He or she will enjoy all the

accolades and limelight. However, immediately the person is declared wanted for committing one crime or the other, you will start to hear that the person is suffering from all kinds of sicknesses. Once such persons are released, that certainly would be the end of the case or some will be ferried to the hospitals and from there negotiate their way to freedom in what is today termed as “soft landing”, that is, a deal where most of the loots are retained, while the culprit walks free. As a people, we must return to the practice of punishing and correcting those who violate the laws of the land. It will not only send the message that society abhors such conducts, it will also deter similarly inclined individuals. I dare say that until we do so, we will only be sowing the seeds of insecurity and anarchy in our society.

How do we save the Education Sector?

Let me say that the education sector is one in which I have always taken a keen interest. I know that most of you do too. In a bid to provide recognition for, and support to, Akwa Ibom State public secondary school teachers in science subjects, English language, Mathematics, History and Economics, we set up the **Inoyo Toro Foundation** (www.Inoyotorofoundation.org) about seven (7) years ago. Working with other similarly minded professionals, the best students in over 30 secondary schools have so far been adopted for life time role modeling and mentoring with a view to building leaders of tomorrow. We believe that no child should be left behind. That is why it is most disheartening to read recently that over 10 million kids are out of school in Nigeria. What type of a nation are we building if we can afford to keep over 10 million of our kids out of school? I believe that this country is blessed with enough resources to educate all our children. Education is a priceless gift which we must bestow as a legacy to every child in this country. We will lay the foundation for the backwardness of our country if we fail to do so.

In concluding this segment, let me zero in on the education sector. In my few years of paying serious attention to this sector, I have a few observations on the problems of the sector and I want to share my thoughts on how to fix them.

Ranking

I think we need to acknowledge how we are positioned relative to other countries. While we pride ourselves as the giant of Africa, it is a sad commentary to see that there is no Nigerian university listed in the first 1,000 universities in the world and also none listed among the top 10 in Africa. This speaks volumes of where we stand. It should create a sense of urgency on the part of Government and the authorities to do something. If, as at 2013, we had 124 universities in the country (of which 50 are privately

owned) and none is in this competitive bracket, why are the authorities still establishing new ones? How diligent is the accreditation process and what needs to be done to create a competitive edge?

A few decades ago, citizens of other countries used to queue up for admission into our universities. Nigerians like education because they recognize the power of education to change destinies. But is it not sad that today you find our young ones go to countries that you never would have thought of prior to now. I understand that in some neighboring countries, the latest business craze is opening universities and Nigerian students populate these institutions. What kind of graduates do we hope to produce from institutions without any pedigree?

The recent 2014 Nigerian Law school examination result is another pointer to this malaise. While the **Chairman, Council of Legal Education, Mr. O.C.J Okocha SAN**, has come out to say that only 33% (and not 71% of the students, as earlier published), failed the examination, it is still a pointer to the type of judicial system that we are building for the future. And I wonder what is happening in our medical schools and what kind of doctor will be attending to us should there be need to find ourselves on that surgery table. We are indeed in trouble!

Instability in Policy Direction/Administration

It is the responsibility of government to set policy direction for the sector. A situation where we witness policy summersaults in the sector does not bode well for sustainability and set the ground for decline. We need some stability with sound policy drivers. **From May 1999 till date (a period of 15 years), there have been 18 ministers of education. Most of them served for fewer than 12 months.** Such high turnover does not promote policy continuity. We also need people appointed not on the basis of political patronage but on core professionalism in order to rejuvenate the sector. A situation where people of doubtful pedigree are

appointed to superintend over this sector is an eloquent testimony of the lack of importance we attach to it. My experience is that Nigeria is not lacking in studies, blue prints and roadmaps. What we lack are flawless execution and sustainability. We therefore need core professionals and stability in the leadership of the education ministry so that policies can be followed through without interruption.

Inadequate Funding

In my opinion, education is the most important sector and deserves urgent attention in this country today. It was late President Nelson Mandela who reminded us that **'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'**. However, if the annual budgetary allocation is anything to go by, we do not seem to attach much importance to this sector. **But if the truth must be told, Nigeria will not make any meaningful headway without significant investments in the education sector, assuming the managers of this sector will not embezzle the funds allocated to the sector.**

One thing is certain though, as a country, we are still far off the mark given the UNESCO recommendation that 26% of a country's total budget must be dedicated to education. According to World Bank statistics, our GDP has grown in quantum leaps from \$67.7Billion in 2003 to \$522.6Billion in 2013 (**~672% growth**). This is a reflection that our economy is improving but it is clear that funds allocation and utilization in the Education sector has not seen any significant growth. In 2012, it was N400.15bn or 8.43% of the total budget; in 2013, it was N426.5bn or 8.7% of the total budget and in 2014, it was N495.2bn or 9.9% of the total budget. I recognize that there are conflicting demands but Government needs to get its priorities right because if we continue at this rate, we will not be out of the woods for a long time to come. It is therefore commendable to read in the Punch Newspapers of November 1, 2014 a statement by the Vice President that the Federal

Government will in the next 5 years provide N1.5 trillion intervention fund for universities to enable them meet international standards. This funding challenge, however, provides an opportunity for the education administrators to be creative in regard to how to generate revenues from other sources to augment government funding.

Static curriculum

Innovation and creativity drive the world today. We are in an ever changing place where the demand for non-traditional skill sets is constantly on the rise and evolving. This and the changing lifestyle of people have continued to create new opportunities for ready and thinking individuals to take advantage of and become entrepreneurs and employers of labour. To mention but a few, we have the likes of Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, WhatsApp's Jan Koun & Brian Acton, Google's Larry Page and bringing it home, Gloop.ng's Olumide Olusanya and Jumia & Konga Founders. These individuals have taken advantage of technology to meet the needs of many in the social media and online commercial space. Today, they are successful employers of labour. Given the **National Content Act 2010** which primarily opens up space for Nigerians to participate in the oil and gas sector; the vibrant construction industry, and development in the agricultural sector, our education system must respond to these changes. We must take another look at our curriculum to ensure it recognizes these realities and what is going on in the economy to better prepare and position our graduates to take advantage of the emerging opportunities. If this university is already doing something in this direction, I salute you. If not, please you need to seriously reflect on this.

Global Linkages & Partnership

A university must pride itself as a center of learning and excellence. This calls for interchanges of knowledge on a global level. What opportunities can be created for our faculties to have

linkages with others? How many faculties in this University have been able to attract such global affiliation or partnership, both for exchange of knowledge and enterprise? In a recent meeting with one of your lecturers, I was quite fascinated by a statement she recalled from her foreign professor to the effect **that ‘if your education cannot change your local environment, then you should consider such wasted?’** It is in this regard that I salute the Vice-Chancellor and promoters of the **International Center for Energy and Environmental Sustainability Research**, which is being established in UNIUYO. I understand that this center is in partnership with some American Universities and a world class oil service company. I know that, given the vision of that center, it should, in a not-too-distant future, be self-sustaining and impactful on the society. I personally look forward to working with the Board to advance the course of the center. I am also aware that there are so many experienced professionals who may want to volunteer time to teach. I sincerely hope the university administration will consider inviting them to come in and enrich the curriculum from a practitioner’s point of view.

University Administration

Who is really in charge of the university? How is the Vice-Chancellor appointed? Who constitutes the governing council and how are they appointed? We must appreciate the fact that universities are today being run as a business. What is the confidence that we are serious about a university system whose council members are nominated purely on the basis of party affiliation? I think we should borrow a leaf from global best practice, where successful CEOs are attracted to serve time on university boards. We now need people who are not only entrepreneurial but are also astute financial planners who can help with fundraising and volunteerism. The time for full dependence on government subvention may be gone, so we need to think out of the box.

I also believe the current trend where even Federal universities must now have Vice-Chancellors appointed from where the university is located, is very wrong. This should be fine where there are qualified indigenes but to create the impression that this is the main criterion is simply to reduce a center of knowledge to a bastion of regionalism.

Finally, let me share with you the recommendations made at the Inoyo Toro Foundation's 2013 Teacher's Award ceremony here in Uyo. The guest speaker, Mr. Osita Chidoka (then Corps Marshal/CEO of the Federal Road Safety Corps), now Aviation Minister, delivered a paper (<http://inoyotorofoundation.org/2013speeches.php>) on the challenges confronting our education sector. Some of the recommendations he proffered include:

- The need for an independent committee made up of experts in the education sector to study the existing educational policy and come up with workable strategies.
- Developing a rigorous, research-based teacher education program 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.
- Creating a significant financial support for teacher education, professional development, reasonable and equitable salaries, and supportive working conditions.
- Factoring the measurement of the impact of teachers and their teaching as a major parameter in the ranking of schools.
- Policy on continuous tracking of students' performance, especially those who did well in their JAMB and pre-degree examinations to see the correlation with their final academic performance at graduation, to see if consistencies are

maintained. This would certainly foster the spirit of continuing high performance.

- 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 memorize only for purpose of passing examinations.
- Participation in internationally known educational rating programs, especially the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)'.

I will encourage all actors in the education sector to read his paper and most especially what we could learn from China, Finland, the United States, Korea, Singapore and Poland in our quest to improve our education system. Why this is important is that though his paper focused on primary and secondary school education, if we do not get these right, our universities will continue to wobble. It is simply a case of **'garbage in, garbage out'**.

Issues for the graduating students to reflect on:

Now, let me turn to the graduating class because today is your day. You must be wondering how to survive in a country where, on a daily basis, you are battered with stories of systemic dysfunction such as corruption, kidnapping, Boko Haram onslaught, unemployment, poverty, diseases (including Ebola scare), etc. Well, as the familiar cliché' goes, **'when the going gets tough, the tough gets going'**. I believe that seated here are tough people who will be able to weather the storm and brace up for tomorrow's challenges and successes.

But as the maxim goes, **'he who comes to equity must come with clean hands'**. So, if you expect success in a just society, you too

must come with clean hands. And for most of you, let's be candid; your hands are not clean. Examination malpractices, rape and cultism, these major problems facing our schools today are practiced not by ghosts but by some of you seated here today. I urge you that as you graduate today, you should turn a new leaf in the new world that you are graduating into.

Recently, I saw a poster with a statement made almost a hundred years ago by Lord Frederick Lugard, Nigeria's first Governor-General from 1912-1918. It reads:

'In character and temperament, the typical African of this race-type is a happy, thrifless, excitable person.

- 1. Lacking in self-control**
- 2. Discipline (and),**
- 3. Foresight,**
- 4. (Full of) personal vanity**
- 5. (with) little sense of veracity (fond of music)**
- 6. (His) thoughts are concentrated on events and feelings of the moment,**
- 7. (And he) suffers little from the apprehension for the future or grief for the past,**
- 8. (He) lacks the power of organization, (and is conspicuously),**
- 9. Deficient in the management and control alike of men or business,**
- 10. He loves the display of power, but fails to realize its responsibilities...**

Perhaps the two traits which have impressed me as those most characteristic of the African native are his 'lack of apprehension' and 'lack of ability to visualize the future'.

When I first read this statement, I was angry. And I think a lot of us would be. However, on reflection, I was tempted to align with the comments by the publishers, **Changing Our World Foundation** (an

NGO managed by Guiding Light Assembly Church, Lagos) to the effect that 'while some may dismiss Lord Lugard's assertion as the 'disparaging ranting of a racist colonialist, however, in the cold light of day, and in the light of historical realities, there seems to be a ring of truth to them that they are probably more relevant today than they were in 1926, and furthermore if we do nothing now, they will still be relevant in another hundred years'.

Today, our society is viewed as one in which morality seems to have taken a flight and corruption has become a part of the acceptable national culture. That is why it is difficult to disagree with Tunji Gardner who, in an article titled 'Corruption As Nigeria's Lingua Franca' (reported in *The Guardian* newspaper of Sunday, June 30, 2013) states that **"Corruption is Nigeria's lingua franca, understood by all and spoken with varying degrees of fluency... it is the transactional language of engagement in nearly every encounter and interaction among Nigerians... modulating everything from our private thoughts and personal behavior, to the theory and practice of our public policies."** What this man is basically saying is that we are all corrupt. We are all morally bankrupt; because seeing what is going on around us, it does appear as if nobody cares any longer. Herein lies both the dilemma and an opportunity for our young ones.

We need to change Nigeria and we need an army of morally upright young men and women. In this regard, I support the position canvassed by Changing Our World Foundation, that **"we must raise our children with a 'can do' mind set. We must pass on a legacy of hard work and an expectation and hope for the future, a legacy built on truth and justice, not 'survival of the fittest' or 'winner-take-all'. We must reward diligence, honesty and selflessness, and punish those, whatever their station, who violate our laws.**

I know you want a better country and I am convinced that you can fix Nigeria.

At this juncture, permit me to offer you a few thoughts on how to navigate life in the real world.

1. The first advice to you is to **banish fear** from your thoughts. Many of us fail before we even put the first step forward. The general but rather sad impression in Nigeria today is that you cannot get by without connection or help. I am not diminishing the role of referral but I think we have carried it too far and our young ones have either lost confidence in them or are giving undue credit to people who in reality contributed little or nothing to their success. Unfortunately, because you had approached them in the first instance, you become eternally indebted to them. Let me assure you this morning that your grade of pass notwithstanding, you can still succeed but you must first jettison fear and you must believe in yourself. I am not saying that it will be easy, but give it your best shot.

When I went for Mobil interview, I had no 'connections'. My parents were not in Lagos and all my friends were of no economic or political value as we were all job hunters. I went in as if my life depended on the outcome. I paid attention to my appearance, wearing my best suit, having read everything I needed to know about Mobil and even when not asked, I volunteered pertinent information. At the final interview, the two other candidates were from known families in Nigeria and they acted as if the job was already theirs. That even made me more determined. So, when the American on the interview panel, whom I later found out was the deputy MD stood up, picked his papers and announced to everyone's hearing, 'we found the right guy. Good day'! I was both relieved and stunned. While I knew I had the job at that point, I could not display my excitement because of the way he broke the news.

2. Be aware that you are being watched and more than ever before, be careful what you do. I know some of you may have indulged in unethical practices in the past and gotten away

with them but this is the time to call it quits. Be **ethical** in all you do. What do I mean by this?

I am always astonished to find otherwise intelligent people reeling out stories that do not add up when subjected to investigation. And it is painful when these are talented future leaders. Why would anyone find delight in falsifying documents - birth certificate, school credentials or even NYSC discharge certificate? I was really saddened a few years ago when a 1st class graduate with a distinction in a Master's degree program had her employment offer withdrawn because the NYSC discharge certificate was forged. She claimed the uncle 'procured' it for her.

It was also disheartening that a young man, from a poor family, who had scaled through a very competitive interview process and was at the verge of employment offer failed our medical examination because he was taking banned substances. Even if he had scaled through this one, given that we have a robust alcohol & drug policy, he would have still been caught.

In ExxonMobil, at the foundation of our business model is a commitment to acting with ethics and integrity in all aspects. We believe that **“the way we achieve results is just as important as the results themselves”**. We expect everyone associated with our activities -- from directors, officers and employees, to suppliers and contractors -- to adhere to the highest ethical standards. And we do not hesitate to sanction those found to be in violation.

Please if you were used to cheating, change your ways, for it is not worth the trouble. Do not join the rat race. Whenever you are confronted with ethical issues, always remember that **'there is no right way to do a wrong thing'** Do not be mistaken, Nigeria will change one day.

3. I enjoy **dreaming** and I do know that everyone is a product of a dream! But what you choose to do with your dream is entirely up to you. Growing up, I always wanted to escape from my environment, not because it was not fun, but primarily because I wanted to explore and to conquer. I am glad I did so almost 30 years ago. I tried to join the Nigerian Navy (I loved the white uniform) and later army (really thought I could be part of a coup to change the country); be a journalist or enroll in the Foreign Service. I craved for anything that would create competition and provide opportunities. So, when I joined Mobil, one of the 1st questions I asked my supervisor was what qualifies an employee for overseas assignment. By knowing early what it takes to gain recognition in the company, I was able to focus on contributions most valued by the organization and therefore was never in doubt that one day, I would be recognized.

Let me share the story of a young man from Akwa Ibom state, who was born in a village where the ambition of every kid was to finish primary school, learn a trade and get married. Going to secondary school was a rarity. And I am talking about events in the 1980s. But he had a different dream. He wanted something different.

He finished his primary education but refused to give up. He proceeded to the 'ultimate' secondary school, and it was only when he got there that he knew that there was something called '*ufok nwed nta ifiok*' (the University). Nobody from his community had ever gone to a university.

Without any financial security, he proceeded to acquire two Master's degrees, then a doctorate degree and others. He also proceeded on further studies overseas where he lived and worked for many years. This dreamer is an alumnus of this university.

So, what is your dream? Follow it and never give up.

4. But having a dream and not **being prepared** to actualize it will come to nothing. It is like desiring to win millions of Naira in a lottery, praying and fasting over it but not buying the ticket. At least do the needful by buying the ticket! Remember that the philosopher, Confucius, advised centuries ago that **'Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation, there is sure to be failure'**. So, to have a head-start I would advise that you consider doing the following:

- Enrol in a Professional Development and Certification program of relevant bodies during NYSC or while waiting to go to camp or to secure employment. Consider taking CISCO, Microsoft, and ORACLE certification if you are ICT savvy, and all of you should be in this age.
- Learn another language. When one of my daughters started taking Chinese classes in Lagos at age 15, I was initially perplexed. Why study Mandarin? But when you realize that China is emerging as the next global leader and has overtaken the USA in trade and investments around the globe, then you can understand why this should be important to you.
 - Consider Mentorship/Volunteering/Internship opportunities? There are so many reputable NGO's that can utilize your services. I know at the moment, community service is not part of the school curriculum unlike the practice in the western world. In fact, students' participation in community programs plays a major role in the College admission process.

Let me therefore use this opportunity to call on our educational authorities to introduce community service into our school curriculum and this should be part of the academic record. Employers of labour should also pay attention to active participation in community service instead of focusing on academic achievement alone.

5. **Hard work does not kill!**

Being prepared will entail working extremely hard. It was — **Colin Powell**, the respected US Army General and first African American appointed US Secretary of state who said that **"A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work."**

I am also sure that most of you who are movie lovers know "Will" Smith, Jr., the famous 'Prince of Belle'. Asked about his many successes, in such a short time, Will said:

'I've always considered myself to be just average talent and what I have is a ridiculous insane obsessiveness for practice and preparation. Or put it differently, 'where I excel is ridiculous, sickening, work ethic. You know, while the other guy's sleeping? I'm working'.

Let me assure you that there is nothing extra ordinary in most of us. Our successes in life can be attributed to hard work and the right attitude. You too can be successful if you work hard. Even if you face challenges on the way, and you should, always take solace in **Proverbs 14:23 -- In all labor there is profit:** but the talk of the lips [tendeth] only to penury.

6. **Help is everywhere!** Unfortunately, sometimes we simply work past without recognizing it.

Do you know how many scholarship programs are begging for recipients? Several organizations within Nigeria and OECD countries are offering scholarships to Nigerian students to study abroad. The Commonwealth scholarships, World Bank Scholarships, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Australian governments -- all offer scholarships to Nigerian students for postgraduate training in their respective countries. Additionally, oil companies/NNPC, NDDC, PDTF, TETFUND, and Presidential

Scholarships are also available. Look for their websites and apply.

There is this young Nigerian from Oyo State, the son of a cocoa farmer and petty trader mother who found his way to South Korea. Throughout his NYSC year, he made it a duty to complete not less than five admission forms a day, sleeping in cyber cafes until he eventually got a scholarship for a Master's program in the UK. From the UK, he ended up in Korea for his PhD and today he is in the USA for his post-doctoral studies. Stop wasting precious time on social media! There is so much useful information on the internet that can change your life.

7. Find a mentor

Liverpool, the English football club established in 1892, has as its motto: **'YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE'**. Life is not intended to be lonely and there is no path that you walk that someone else has not walked before. Unfortunately, not everyone realizes the need to seek a mentor early. A mentor is simply someone who provides guidance, training, support or advice to a less experienced person.

When in 2004, I was appointed into the Board of Mobil Producing Nigeria as Executive Director, the first one from this 'neck of the wood' and probably the youngest in the industry at that time, the entire industry was engulfed in serious community crises--oil installations were routinely attacked and workers, especially expatriates, kidnapped for ransom. I may have been well trained on my job but I must confess that there was no script to readily guide me in managing the unfolding drama and I was at that time responsible for the Company's External Relations in Nigeria. I worked hard, burning out and achieving little or no results. I then decided to seek out a mentor. I needed someone not only more experienced in life but one who had successfully managed an organization that went through a crisis.

I went in search of Prelate Emeritus Sunday Mbang, whom I had never personally met before but knew had successfully reconciled the warring factions of the Methodist Church Nigeria. He also later became the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the turbulent days of military regime. And I am glad I did! From his wealth of experience, he gave me wise counsel which helped me in the assessment and management of issues, including my personal life.

So, why not identify early someone who can help you along the way. But please don't go asking how to be a millionaire without knowing first how to manage a hundred thousand!

General comment:

This is election season. You must register and vote for credible people to get into government. You must resist the temptation to be used to foment trouble during this election. Let's reason together: if we vote for credible people our democracy will be deepened and the country will be better for it. It was the revered scientist **Albert Einstein** who said that doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is insanity. We must demonstrate that we are not insane by ensuring that we vote for people with proven track record, integrity and above all the fear of God. We must be prepared to ask our politicians to be accountable to the people.

Conclusion:

So, to the graduating class of 2014, I salute you and welcome you to the real world. I have worked with so many graduates of this university and have had utmost regard for them. In fact, they have shown commitment to the credo of this institution - **Unity, Learning and Service**. I encourage you to do the same. While I cannot guarantee that you will have a smooth sail in life, you have to persevere and be optimistic no matter the situation. Always look up to God, your creator, and when worried about your past or concerned for the future, take solace in one of my favorite hymns, about God's faithfulness:

**Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!**

**Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!**

Thank you, good luck and God bless!

Udom Inoyo
November 21, 2014.