The Millennium Development Goals and Private Sector Participation in University Education: The Case of Nigeria.

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a global issue and the attainment of these goals has remained the focus of the development agenda all over the world. No doubt, private sector participation in university education has a significant role to play in achieving these MDGs. Private universities are globally set up to satisfy a need – for both students and indeed markets. This paper examines the contributions of the private sector participation in the provision of university education in Nigeria vis-à-vis the MDGs and the extent to which these private sector initiatives have solved the problem of equal access to university education (unsatisfied demand) with a view to mapping out some planning and policy decisions for better improvement and operation. The need for government to support private sectors participation in the provision of university education towards meeting the MDGs in Nigeria is also advocated for in this paper.

Keywords:
Access to education, Millennium Development Goals, National Universities Commission, Private Sector Participation, University Education

Introduction

In 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, 192 countries arrived at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the aim of reducing global poverty, illiteracy and enhancing sustainable development across the globe with the 2015 set as
the target year. One of the strongest instruments that could be used to attain these goals is education and more particularly, university education. Education is widely accepted as a leading instrument for promoting economic growth. For Africa, where growth is essential if the continent is to climb out of poverty, education is particularly important.

The emphasis so much placed on university education, in recent times, becomes necessary because of the vital role, which university education plays in the socio-economic and self-development of a country and individuals respectively and which has made its demand increase over the years. Potentially, higher education (universities in this context) can widen rather than reduce socio-economic growth and human capital development of the country (Adepoju and Akinola, 2009; Adepoju and Fadokun, 2009).

To become an economic giant has made many developing countries to allow the private sector to operate institutions of higher learning. This is to widen the accessibility or create more places and opportunities for intending candidates, reduce absolute reliance on government funding and more essentially, to strengthen market forces in higher education (Adepoju and Akinola, 2009).

According to Okebukola (2005), private sector participation in the provision of university education in Africa assumed a rapidly changing scene from 1995. Prior to that, only Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya had privately owned universities in Anglophone Africa. The entrance of Nigeria and South Africa into the ‘scene’ in 1996 and 1997 respectively has changed the face of private higher education in Africa. Today, most countries in the continent have private higher education institutions, mostly universities, offering programmes in “market attraction” disciplines like Management, Information and Communication Technology and Law. Private participation in tertiary education according to Materu (2006) has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to easing the social demand for higher education, accounting for up to 20% of enrolments in some countries.

In some of the countries, like Ghana, the universities can only, affiliate with a public institution for the award of degrees. Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Egypt are all
witnessing rapid growth in the number and size of private higher education institutions and are developing quality assurance mechanisms to address the concern on quality issues in private education. (Okebukola, 2005). Promotion of access to higher education has also encouraged the Nigerian government to embark on the National Open and Distance Learning Programme (ODL). This was done through the revival of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN, 2006), which has study centre in each state capital. NOUN is expected to cater to the higher education needs of large number of candidates who could not gain admission into the conventional universities or who could not afford to leave their present jobs every year.

There is no doubt that the widespread agitation for an expansion and the need to ensure that every Nigerian child has access to university education and increased high-level national manpower requirements and technological development also contributed greatly to the establishment of more universities in Nigeria. The past three decades have witnessed significant changes within the university system in Nigeria. Notable among such changes are the increase in the number of universities and programmes across the entire universities with staff strength of about 25,000 (Okebukola, 2004). By far, however, the greatest change has been in the explosion in student population and the number of applicants seeking university admissions. The total student enrolment in all Nigerian universities grew from just over 2000 in 1962 to over 700,000 in 2004 (Okebukola, 2004).

The implications of the increase in the number of applicants seeking admission into the public universities in Nigeria are the limited spaces which impose restrictions on access, inadequate physical facilities, inadequate academic staff to cater for the demand, poor quality of the programmes in the institutions.

What are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education for member states. The targets are intended to increase efforts to meet the
needs of the world’s poorest, reducing global poverty and increasing living standards. The goals were officially agreed upon at the 2000 Millennium Summit when world leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration.

**Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- Reduce by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.
- Reduce by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

**Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education**
- Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

**Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

**Goal 4. Reduce child mortality**
- Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

**Goal 5. Improve maternal health**
- Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

**Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

**Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the losses of environmental resources.
- Reduce by half by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.
- By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
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Goal 8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

- Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system
- Address the special needs of the least developed countries
- Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing States.
- Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.
- In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

The goals listed above today guide the efforts of virtually all countries and have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress.

Links between University Education, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction

Obviously, there is a belief that a strong link exists between university education and economic growth with a multiplier effect on poverty reduction in a country. Knowledge-based competition within a globalizing economy is prompting a fresh consideration of the role of higher education in development and growth. Previously, it was often viewed as an expensive and inefficient public service that largely benefited the wealthy and privileged. Now, it is understood to make a necessary contribution, in concert with other factors, to the success of national efforts to boost productivity, competitiveness and economic growth.
There is a correlation between higher education (university education in this context) and economic growth. For instance an analysis of Indian and cross-national data on higher education, economic growth and development using poverty and human development indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy clearly shows that higher education plays a significant role in development. Through a regression analysis of developing and developed countries, the analysis found a strong correlation between higher education and economic growth. For instance, the findings among other things have empirically shown that:

i. higher education enhances the earnings of individuals and contributes to economic development.

ii. higher education makes a significant contribution to reduction in absolute as well as relative poverty.

iii. higher education is related to human development indicators which reflect other dimensions of human poverty, as it significantly reduces infant mortality and increases life expectancy.

(Ram, 1982; Standing, 1981)

In spite of this development, development programmes in many developing countries still continue to focus exclusively on basic education, seriously neglecting higher education. Sustainable socio-economic development implies that education systems focus on human capital as well as human development, on economic growth as well as poverty reduction, on modern technologies as well as traditional methods, and on global as well as local concerns.

University education has also been described by Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky (2006) as a determinant as well as a result of income, and can produce public and private benefits. University education may create greater tax revenue, increase savings and investment, and lead to a more entrepreneurial and civic society. It can also improve a nation’s health, contribute to reduced population growth, improve technology, and strengthen governance. With regard to the benefits of university education for a country's economy, many observers attribute India's leap onto the world economic stage as stemming from its decades-long successful efforts to provide
high-quality, technically oriented tertiary education to a significant number of its citizens (Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky, 2006).

**The Potency of University Education in the Attainment of the MDGs**

University education plays an important role towards loosening the grip of global poverty. This is possible through its direct contributions to economic growth as it influences a nation’s productivity and international competitiveness. It does this by training a qualified and adaptable labour force, by assisting the nation to access and generate new knowledge, and by adapting global knowledge for local use. In this way, it helps to determine living standards.

University education also reduces poverty through redistribution and empowerment. Specifically, it generates empowerment through the building of social capital and aids redistribution by expanding opportunities for employability, income, and social mobility. University education also strengthens the entire education sector. Tertiary institutions train (and re-train) teachers, school principals and system managers. Their staff play major role in curriculum development and evaluation for primary and secondary education. Their researchers analyze education performance, identify problems, and provide policy advice.

No doubt, university education contributes importantly towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Universities train the professionals – doctors, nurses, teachers and administrators – who will oversee and implement MDGs activities. In addition, they foster relevant capacities in research, applied technology and community service that are essential for improving welfare levels for poor families, particularly vulnerable women and children, in those countries targeted by the Millennium Development Goals.

Because of their special role in promoting innovation and boosting productivity at the international as well as at the national level, university education in Nigeria, and in all industrialized countries, have a responsibility to engage vigorously with their counterparts in the developing world.
Private Sector Participation in University Education in Nigeria and The MDGs

The private sector must be an integral part towards increasing access to university education in Nigeria if the MDGs are to be realized. As enunciated by Okebukola (2008), some universities in the world have established world-class reputation for themselves in some particular areas. For example, Stanford University in the U. S. is world-renowned for excellent private sector funding R&D. MIT is one of the world’s leading universities in integrated R&D and consultancy with private sector. The Ecole Polytechnique in Paris is famous for outstanding programmes in integrating with companies (Okebukola, 2008).

Indeed, one of the most pronounced issues surrounding access to university education and its operation in recent years is the relative merits and strengths of public (government) and private (independent) universities. Until recent years, serious discussions regarding the role of private universities in relation to access to university education were characterized as being of importance to advanced countries.

Recent developments in the Third World Countries particularly, in Africa precipitated the need for private sector participation (PSP) in the provision of university education for intending candidates. For instance, in Nigeria, several initiatives and reform programmes were introduced by the federal government and directed towards increasing private sector participation in the provision of some essential services such as education. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has also been mandated to grant approval to private individuals, groups and organizations who wish to establish universities. The success story is that there has been an increase in the number of private universities in the last four years.

No doubt, the private sector response to establishment of university education has been unprecedented and intense and has made Nigeria to become aligned to other developed countries such as the United States of America, Britain and Japan where private sector participation is taking a pride of place in the provision of university education, the area that was hitherto regarded as government reserves. The
development in Nigeria vis-à-vis private sector participation in the provision of university education is a welcome development towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria. Below is a list of private universities with the year each was founded is presented.

**Figure 1: List of Private Universities in Nigeria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Type of University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Babcock University, Ilishan Remo</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Madonna University, Okija</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Igbinedion University, Okada</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Bowen University, Iwo</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Covenant University, Ota</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Pan-African University, Lagos</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Specialized (PG Only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Benson Idahosa University, Benin City</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>ABTI-American University, Yola</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Redeemers University,</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Caritas University, Amorji-Nke, Enugu</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>CETEP City University, Lagos</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Bingham University, Jos</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Katsina University, Katsina</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Renaissance University, Enugu</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Bells University of Technology, Badagary</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Lead City University of Ibadan, Oyo State</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Wukari Jubilee University</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Crescent University, Abeokuta</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Novena University, Oguine, Delta State</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>University of Mkar</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Joseph Ayo Babalola University,Ikeji-Arakeji</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Caleb University, Lagos</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Fountain University, Osogbo</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Obong University, Obong Ntok</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Salem University, Lokoja</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Tansian University, Umunya</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Veritas University, Abuja</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Wesley Univ. of Science &amp; Tech., Ondo</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Science &amp; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Western Delta Univ., Oghara, Delta State</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Achievers University, Owo</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:**
Impact of Private Universities in Nigeria on MDG 1

In relation to MDG 1, attempts have been made to address the issue of poverty eradication and hunger through private universities by structuring their curricular to incorporate entrepreneurial education. For instance, the National Universities Commission (NUC) before approving the establishment of private universities in Nigeria ensures that their curriculum contents tend towards entrepreneurial education or vocational education.

An examination of the vision, mission and curriculum contents of these private universities would reveal that they tend toward scientifically and entrepreneurial/vocational education. Apart from this, evidences have shown that most of these private universities have also resorted to having roundtable meetings with employers of labour in Nigeria to discuss the issue of providing job opportunities to their prospective graduates. This is a welcome development in Nigeria since this initiative is an attempt to reduce the spate of poverty and hunger.

It also encourages prospective university graduates to opt for private universities since the possibility of being absorbed into the private sector is higher after graduation. The case of Covenant University, Ogun State, Nigeria can be sited here where before the first convocation lecture, the university management invited employers of labour to a meeting where most of the private companies promised to render possible assistance to the university graduates by providing them job opportunities.

In terms of meeting the 60:40 science – arts admission ratio policy of the government towards improving the technological base in the country, private universities are found to be complying with this policy because their curricula are essentially scientifically-based. As stated by Okebukola (2005), the NUC has already put in place a requirement for all proposed private universities to be science and technologically-oriented. For this reason, the programmes of the private universities in Nigeria today are structured toward meeting this government policy.
Impact of Private Universities in Nigeria on MDG 2

By 1999, there were three private universities in Nigeria:

1. Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State
2. Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State
3. Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State

Between 2000 and August, 2008, 31 more private universities have been licensed to operate by the NUC. Presently, there are 33 federally owned, 32 State-owned and 49 privately owned in Nigeria (104 altogether). The emergence of private universities have increased access to university education and indirectly raised hope for the realization of, and achieving universalization of basic education because more children would be enrolled in primary and secondary schooling with the hope of securing admission into universities. Of course, the objective of the basic education (MDGS) in Nigeria is to ensure that by 2015, children will be able to complete 9-year basic education so that illiteracy rate could be reduced,

However, the initiative of giving private individuals and corporate bodies opportunities to establish their universities would raise the hope of having access to university education by the children hence, more of them would be enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Even though, higher education does not figure on the poverty-reduction agenda of many developing countries and international aid agencies, and is not reflected in the MDGs, yet, literacy and basic education rarely provide employment skills that can ensure a reasonable salary or standard of living. No doubt, few literacy and basic education programmes are imparting sustainable skills or ensuring that children do not relapse into illiteracy. Although, it helps to reduce poverty, it only raises the poor just above the poverty line, and leaves them in danger of falling below the poverty line again.
Impact of Private Universities in Nigeria on MDG 6

Government at the federal and state as well as local government levels in Nigeria are intensifying efforts through universities to eradicate HIV/AIDS pandemic and other related diseases. Universities are integrating into their curricula courses on HIV/AIDS and their education. Observations and examinations of the curricula of Nigeria universities have shown that private universities are more serious in this attempt. Most of these universities have set up and designed voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) and antiretroviral treatment (ART) programmes that are attractive to the beneficiaries (staff and students).

Apart from these, most of the private universities in Nigeria offer free VCT and ART to both staff and students, even though the participation is low because confidentiality is not always guaranteed. The Nigerian dailies sometimes in July, 2008 carried it as news item that one private university in Ogun State, Nigeria conducted HIV/AIDS test on its students. Of course, this is to show the extent to which private universities in Nigeria are making attempts to stem the scourge. As stated by Okojie (2008), one of the characteristics of the private universities in Nigeria is the minimal occurrence of the incidences of anti-social activities and lower level of HIV/AIDS compared to the public universities.

The Implications

As the world progresses toward attaining the MDGs, global forces which structure regional economics and globalization have continued to demonstrate the critical importance of knowledge in development. A nation that fails to develop its human resources through knowledge acquisition cannot develop anything else, no matter how well endowed with natural resources nor attain the MDGs even if the target year is extended beyond 2015, the target year. All that Nigeria needs now and in future towards the attainment of the MDGs is to ensure that the youths develop technical skills that would enable them contribute to the country’s economic growth and development.
The need to ensure that adequate facilities are made available to the universities in Nigeria by the owner-government is highly desirable if these universities are to operate just like the world-class universities, and to meet the MDGs. Okebukola (2008) citing Altbach, stated that, adequate facilities for academic work are essential – the most advanced and creative research and the most innovative teaching must have access to appropriate libraries and laboratories, as well as to Internet and other electronic resources. Adequate funding must also be available to support the research and teaching as well as other functions of the university.

The need to re-orientate private sectors in Nigeria towards funding research efforts of the universities is very imperative if the MDGs must be realized. As enunciated by Okebukola (2008), some universities in the world have established world-class reputation for themselves in some particular areas.

The quality of the inputs of the private university, in terms of the teachers and students is another important factor to be considered if Nigerian universities must stand the test of attaining the MDGs. Presently, most of the universities in Nigeria are facing the problem of brain-drain while the quality of the candidates being admitted is dwindling over time. Where this occurs, the realization of the MDGs may be a mirage. Closely tied to quality of students in private universities is the quantity of students. Herein comes adherence to carrying capacity. According to Okebukola (2008), since 1998, most of the universities (private universities inclusive) in the country deviated markedly from their carrying capacities and enrolled more students than their resources could support for quality university education.

There is the need to vigorously pursue entrepreneurial programmes in Nigerian universities such that university graduates would be able to be self-sufficient after their graduation. This is necessary because this area of self-sufficiency is one of the cardinal objectives of the MDGs. University autonomy and the need to increase budgetary allocations to education sector are very imperative. Presently, Nigerian government has not been able to meet the United Nations’ recommendation of 26% vote of country’s annual budget to education sector.
After considerable dip in their operations, particularly, since the 1980s which also affected their productivity and contributions to national development, Nigerian universities are very much in need of revival and revitalization. Beyond their traditional roles of knowledge generation and dissemination, manpower development and service, Nigerian universities are being called upon to play a more active role in social transformation and development. Also important is the need for regulatory mechanisms for private higher institutions of learning to meet the MDGs.

Also, other noteworthy gaps that exist are in the area of staff qualification and numbers, research productivity, use of technology for teaching and learning, and level of funding. All these variables can exert much influence on the quality of university education in Nigeria and thereby predict MDGs attainment by the target year, 2015

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Attempts have been made in this paper to appraise private sector participation in the provision of and access to university education in Nigeria vis-à-vis the attainment of some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has been established in this paper that private universities are globally set up to satisfy a need – for both students and indeed markets. Impacts have been made in the areas of human capital development and economic growth. In relation to stemming the incidence of HIV/AIDS, private universities have done better than the public universities while more access has been created to university education in the country where many prospective university candidates have no hope.

The need for government to support private sectors by the government to further widen and create more access to university education in Nigeria so as to reduce the unsatisfied demand in the country and to increase their participation toward attaining the MDGs is very imperative. The quality of the inputs of the private universities, in terms of the teachers and students is another important factor to be considered if these universities must stand the test of attaining the MDGs. From all
indications and available facts, private sector participation in the provision of university education in Nigeria has helped tremendously in attaining three (Goals 1, 2 and 6) of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Government should therefore continue to provide conducive atmosphere for them to operate.

References


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