

6th Matriculation Ceremony of Chrisland University and the tortuous Experience along Eternally Rehabilitated Lagos-Ibadan Expressway

By

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On March 11, 2021, at 07:17, I sent a WhatsApp message to my childhood friend Ambassador Julius Ajasa Sodipe, (a.k.a Jas & Co as he thought he would be a big businessman as opposed to an Ambassador when we were kids and I gave him that appellation), as I left my residence to embark on a journey to Abeokuta, the capital city of my state of origin in Nigeria. As I picked up my first paid job in Ibadan in 1973, I consolidated an earlier chancy meeting with Julius and we became inseparable before I proceeded to study at the University of Lagos, where he also later came to study. I had thought I would pick him up to accompany me to the matriculation of 297 new students at Chrisland University, Abeokuta. The internationally recognized award-winning Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Chinedum Peace Babalola, had invited both of us to the event.

As the 2020 lockdown canceled my lined up international speaking engagements to Addis Ababa in March, South Africa in April and the US in April and September, it dawned on me that post lockdown would be a different situation: a new normal of increased online living. It became necessary to reinvent my post-UN life plans. I had earlier written on planning for retirement in what I titled “Retirement Plan Parts I&II” in 2017 upon my retirement from the United Nations. Knowledge sharing is something I have always enjoyed, so I engaged in this under the auspices of Yintab Strategy Consults (YSC).

I couldn’t help being nostalgic about the experience I garnered as a University teacher about 28 years ago. The idea of a return to the academics, I had not clearly shut out but got too occupied as I worked on knowledge sharing under YSC with the assistance of Mr. Abraham Ameh, my Special Assistant, who has been with me from the beginning at YSC, initially as a Youth Corper and now a valuable collaborator.

Eventually, with the new Covid-19 normal, I decided to hearken to the encouraging persuasions of my two egbons: Profs. Ade Kukoyi and Funso Akere to return to the University and share knowledge. I mentioned this to Jas & Co as I did with Prof. Adigun Agbaje, my teachers: Profs Adele Jinadu, Alaba Ogunsanwo and late Prof. Adeoye Akinsanya. I knew what it takes: research and contribution to knowledge which I enjoy doing even when I ran after governments and their rebels on behalf of the UN trying to foster peace.

Julius had asked for my CV which I regularly beefed up for international speaking engagements and consultancies. I think the advantage for me, is the combination of well-sought after hands-on experience in the fields of security, international development, and humanitarian affairs which I can readily relate with theories and literatures on solving global problems. Some afternoon, Julius called to say he just left the VC of Chrisland University. Apparently, he went to meet her for the first time, and told her something like “appoint my friend as Professor in your University and you will not regret it”. Many of my academic friends as well as caddies at my golf clubs already gave me the title in spite of my protestations that in the British system, unlike the American one, the fact that you teach in a University does not give you the right to be dubbed Professor.

Prof. Babalola apparently laughed at Ambassador Sodipe for thinking things are done that way but asked to meet me at my earliest convenience. I decided to combine a scheduled visit to President Obasanjo with seeing her in the company of Jas & Co., and that marked the beginning of my relationship with Chrisland University. I wrote a piece in November last year on the convocation of a University that comes out of the dedication of a virtuous woman Chief Winifred Awosika, who with a vision made a mark by starting and consistently built a life of commitment to education with Chrisland group of schools and in 2015, established Chrisland University. With an undying interest in the academics, I am naturally drawn to support such vision and hard work in providing quality and globally competitive educational services.

To get to the University from my residence should take about one and a half hours driving at my UN instilled 100 kilometres an hour. Lagos hosts about 22 million people. There are only two roads out of Lagos, an epileptic colonial era railway that is as good as none existent as well as a newly installed train to Ibadan that is yet to win the confidence of Nigerians. There had been so much deception on this in the past. Probably why the Federal Minister of Transportation is yet to be taken seriously that the train service has indeed started.

On July 29, 2018, I had written a lamentation on the fact that a one and a half hour travel to give a speech at Ibadan, the political capital of Yoruba people took me 5 hours. As I stated then: Corruption induced eternal rehabilitation of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway that was conceived under the General Yakubu Gowon administration and completed by General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1977/78 coupled with huge traffic build-up in Ibadan itself was responsible. Infrastructure deficit as a result of looting is killing us gradually, apart from losing productive man-hours. Not sure how much of my lifespan reduced by sitting for an unplanned five hours behind the wheel. The deplorable state of road infrastructure is costing many lives as a result of road accidents. The rehabilitation of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway started under President Obasanjo who left office in May 2007 and is still on going as construction is awarded and re-awarded to different people and no-one held responsible for money diverted into pockets without completing the rehabilitation of just about 120km road in over 15 years.

The title of this piece could have been: “Eternal Rehabilitation of Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Continues to Shorten Lives”. But the 6th matriculation ceremony of Chrisland University was on my mind as I wrote. It was scheduled for 11:00 on March 11, 2021. I figured that I would, at most, lose two hours to “eternal rehabilitation” and would arrive Abeokuta by 10:30 at the worst. Alas, Ambassador Sodipe’s call at 13:13 to inquire about where I was as I arrived at the gate of Chrisland University established that a journey of one and a half hours had taken me six hours short of 4 minutes.

I kept listening to Lagos traffic radio to know why the situation was so bad on a Thursday. If you stay around Lagos-Ibadan, you should understand that Fridays entering the weekend are expectedly terrible on the roads. The announcers kept repeating that there had been an accident between a petroleum products tanker and a sand tipper. However, this was partially true. The eternal rehabilitation of the expressway cost me about two and a half hours at a point that should have taken only half an hour of a smooth drive. Currently, there are debates that part of the loot of former Governor Ibori that the British Government seized and returning some this week is to be used for Julius Berger’s eternal rehabilitation. Four years from now, I can bet that the eternal rehabilitation would continue. Indeed the tanker and tipper accident that blocked part of the road was further down from the eternal rehabilitation spot. That cost another two and a half hours. There was tension all over the place with the crazy Lagos driving. So, I got to the Sagamu interchange

after 5 hours behind the wheels with so many tensed up compatriots wanting to use the less than salutary bathrooms that some of us were happy was available courtesy of the NNPC petrol station. I had seen many and women do it by their respective cars when they couldn't hold it anymore. But I was worried about being photographed doing the same in these days that everyone is a photojournalist. I wonder how many more times, I would have to lament on the tortuous experience on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway, especially now that I would have to use it more? Like we always say around here. "It is well oo"

I concluded the matriculation ceremony had ended. But on arrival, I learnt it was about to start just before 2 pm. Some more matriculation gowns had been held up in traffic. The Guest Speaker at the matriculation: Dr. Gbenga Adeoye shared ideas on what it takes to succeed in life. I note and agree with his emphasis on character among the rules he espoused. The society could be better if our Universities actually instill "Character with Learning" as we always chorus at matriculation and convocation ceremonies.

The Vice-Chancellor equally rendered an engaging welcoming speech in which she espoused the importance of living a purpose driven life as choices are made. She espoused on the moral fibre of the University that has zero tolerance for a number of vices like cultism and corruption. She spent a portion of her speech to present me when she stated: "The University recently appointed Babafemi Badejo as the first Chrisland University Professor after a thorough assessment by national and international experts. He has been appointed a Professor of Political Science/International Relations...He is bringing in his expertise to Chrisland University and will be setting up the Chrisland Institute for Security, Development and Diplomacy (CISDD), which will be the first of its kind in West Africa..."

She added that the "University has attracted other experts in the past few months. We will be setting up other centres such as centre for Distance Education for top-up programmes and a Forensic centre for Crime detection".

While I listened to Prof. Chinedum Peace Babalola, I knew that beyond the record of being the first Professor to be appointed at the University since its creation in 2015, I recognized that I have a great task ahead of me.

Beyond the walls of Chrisland University, the quality of education has been on a downward trend in Nigeria. The priorities of our governments have been away from education. UNESCO suggested that governments should invest at least 6% of their GNP in education and in budgetary terms, 15-20 percent. The Nigerian situation has been below standards. With a miniscule percent of GDP on education, the budgetary allocation to education at the federal level is at a record low of 5.6% in 2021 and 6.7% in 2020 with the 2014 highest of 10.54 still below standard.

However, the focus should not just be on allocation, many factors like the implicit values behind the allocation as well as budget performance (how much of allocation is actually spent), and the substance of the spending are important. With the high rate of corruption, what goes into the pockets of lootocrats must be in focus also. At some point in 2013, former minister of Education, Oby Ezekwesili, once lamented how Education budget to GDP for South Africa stood at 7.9%, Ghana 4.4%, Angola 4.2% and Nigeria was at 0.79%. Using GDP, the Nigerian situation is woeful. This compares with successful countries we want to compete with like Tunisia, Denmark, Singapore and Canada devoting about 14-20 percent of GDP to education.

Ezekwesili also emphasized how misallocation of investment and structural dysfunction in the educational sector, was a more critical issue than funding itself. “First you need to change the structural dysfunctionality before providing the fund, otherwise you will have a well-funded dysfunctionality”.

I am very excited I got the opportunity to be back to the University system again, this time as a Professor. I hope to bring the most value to a very progressive University that is seeking to do things differently. I look forward to a meritorious relationship with Chrisland University and especially on the building of CISDD.