



**Attaining the Peak, Wadham College.
Oxford University Department of Education**

***Two-Day Visit to Oxford by His Excellency
President of the ECOWAS Commission***

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"EDUCATION, YOUTH AND GLOBALISATION"

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President of the ECOWAS Commission**

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Learned Professors, Researchers and Students of Oxford
University
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I. Introduction

When in 2000, the World Education Forum met in Dakar, Senegal, to evaluate the achievements and challenges related to access to education as contained in the 1990 Jomtien *Declaration on Education for All (EFA)*, it noted that even though modest progress had been made by countries since the Declaration, formidable hurdles were yet to be surmounted.

The Forum deemed it unacceptable, for instance, that an estimated 880 million adults worldwide were illiterate in 2000 while 113 million children, 60 percent of whom were girls, had no access to primary education. To rectify the situation, the Forum set the world six targets to be achieved by 2015. Among them were the completion of free and compulsory primary education by all; equitable access to appropriate learning and skills programmes; reduction of adult illiteracy by 50 percent; elimination of gender disparity; and ensuring quality education.

Since then, as you may know, UNESCO has been monitoring these goals through its annual *Education for all Global Monitoring Reports*. In 2009, the Report focused on governance challenges to education while this year's report targeted marginalisation. There is no doubt that issues of governance and marginalisation are critical to the attainment of the educational goals set at the Dakar Forum. It is appropriate and praiseworthy, therefore, that you students of the Department of Education have initiated the *Attaining the Peak* Programme, with the lofty objective of combating marginalisation in education by promoting access to all without regard to background and location. As a parent, diplomat and Chief Executive of a Regional Integration Community from one of the most marginalised regions of the world, I totally share the wisdom and ideals enshrined in the Vision and Mission of the Programme. That is why I felt touched, privileged and honoured

when my sister, Dr. Emefa Juliet Amoako, and the *Attaining the Peak* team invited me not only to visit Oxford University, the global citadel of learning and incubator of ideas that propel our civilisation to ever newer heights, but also to address you this evening. I would like to express my profound appreciation and gratitude to the authorities, staff and students of the Department of Education, Wadham and St. Anne's Colleges, and the University for the honour and hospitality.

Distinguished Audience,

I have been tasked to share with you my thoughts on *Education, Youth and Globalisation* – three themes that define the key challenges facing young people, parents, communities and educational institutions, as well as governments and the international community, in today's fast-changing and multi-cultural world. I wish to contextualise my address to you within the twin framework of governance and marginalisation, and to conclude by telling you how my Organisation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is striving to meet these challenges. It is, therefore, appropriate that I begin by telling you about ECOWAS and the challenges it has confronted in the course of its evolution.

II. ECOWAS – A Dynamic Regional Integration Project

Not unlike the European Economic Community (EEC) that later transformed into the European Union (EU), ECOWAS was

founded in 1975 by the Treaty of Lagos as a regional economic community that grouped sixteen Member States in West Africa (Mauritania recently pulled out, leaving fifteen States). Its vision was to create a single regional economic space through integration and collective self-reliance; an economic space with a single market and single currency capable of generating accelerated socio-economic development and competing more meaningfully in the global market of large trade blocs and uneven patterns of trade between the industrialised North and raw material-based economies of the South. It was seen as a prerequisite to the creation of a continental Union that was being advocated by Pan-Africanists across the continent. The ECOWAS agenda was, thus, to promote market integration through policy harmonization and coordination, and the acceleration of the development of physical infrastructure, such as energy, road, rail and telecommunication networks, to facilitate market integration.

However, after about a decade and a half of its existence, there was the realisation that the Organisation had not made the desired impact the founders had hoped for, because it lacked the necessary political environment within which to pursue its goals. As you may be aware, the end of the Cold War coincided with increased pressure from below in West Africa and elsewhere against dictatorship and bad governance. In the States with the weakest institutions amidst extreme

marginalisation, debilitating civil wars broke out in which the marginalised youth played a key role, either as perpetrators or victims of violence. Against this backdrop, the responsibility for ECOWAS affairs had been entrusted to the Ministries of Finance, depriving ECOWAS of a robust political framework to deal with the challenges.

The Heads of State and Government had to act urgently to avert the paralysis. First, they directed the transfer of responsibility for ECOWAS affairs to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs or Regional Integration. Secondly, they urgently created a politico-military framework (the Standing Mediation Committee and the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group) in 1990 to spearhead interventions to end the civil wars in the region. These two measures were instrumental in allowing the Organisation to assume the dynamic posture that we see today.

To build on the successes, the Authority of ECOWAS intensified its efforts to strengthen the Organisation's normative and institutional frameworks. In 1993, the Heads of State took the landmark decision to revise its Treaty by conferring a supranational status to the Organisation and creating an Executive Secretariat under the leadership of an Executive Secretary to implement their Decisions. Further, in 2007, they took the decision to transform the Secretariat into a Commission, at the head of which is a President supported by a

Vice-President and seven Commissioners, who oversee Departments, with Directors as career heads managing Sectoral Directorates. As part of the transformation, the Organisation adopted a new Vision, with an underlying objective to transform the region from 'an ECOWAS of States into an ECOWAS of Peoples' with an enhanced role assigned to the private sector and civil society, particularly the youth and women, in the integration processes.

The impact of ECOWAS has been particularly evident in the proactive stance adopted by its leadership to confront challenges to peace and security, and governance. Realising that bad governance was the root and intermediate cause of the instability, ECOWAS enacted and began enforcing norms and standards of good governance. Under the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), for example, it set minimum constitutional convergence criteria for ECOWAS membership based on common values of democracy and free market, separation of powers, popular participation, the democratic control of the armed forces, and 'zero tolerance' for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means. In the past couple of years, ECOWAS has suspended the membership of two States - Guinea and Niger - for violating the Protocol. Partly as a consequence of this pro-active posture, today, 13 of the 15 Member States of the region are led by democratically elected governments. The

suspended countries are on course to restore the constitutional legality that had been disrupted. Already, good fiscal policies and good governance practices are propelling West African economies to new heights, with growth forecasts for 2010 estimated at 6 percent, despite the global financial crises. Infrastructure is being progressively expanded and the region is the first in Africa to ensure free (visa-free) movement across borders.

III. Globalisation and its Challenges

Distinguished Audience

Permit me now to turn to the theme of today's discourse by interrogating the impacts of Globalisation on our societies, with special emphasis on the youth and education. Accelerated Globalisation, particularly after the end of the Cold War, has become a double-edged sword whose blessings to world civilisation cannot be denied, but whose negative spin-offs cannot also be ignored. Globalisation is producing winners just as it is throwing up losers, and the challenge is to make Globalisation work for the realisation of one's goals.

The defining characteristic of Globalisation is the breakneck speed with which information and communication, as well as the technological tools that accompany them, are produced, reproduced and disseminated. In the last quarter of a century

or so, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has demonstrated its capacity as a leveller of opportunities between the North and the South. In fact, ICT offers the most realistic chance to bridge the knowledge and technological gap between the North and the South, and between the privileged and the marginalised. This is already being proved right by the emerging economies of South East Asia and Latin America, particularly India, China and Brazil. These countries are today bona fide members of the global knowledge society and are on the verge of rivalling the traditional powers in all aspects of technological and human development, thanks partly to their effective exploitation of the vistas opened by ICT and comparative advantages. For the impoverished countries of this world desirous of rapid industrialisation and development, these new economic powerhouses offer realistic alternatives to the traditional powers.

Today, ICT is central to all aspects of human endeavour, and nowhere is it more relevant than in communities and societies characterised by low levels of literacy and numeracy. The explosion of mobile telephony and the increasing affordability of personal computers are positively transforming the rural environment more than ever before. ICT is encouraging the illiterate to become literate and facilitating greater access to critical knowledge for the community in a manner that is opening new economic opportunities and facilitating

achievements with a potential to surpass the Millennium Development Goals by increasing literacy, eradicating poverty and improving nutrition and healthcare. ICT has also been instrumental in promoting democracy, making nonsense of censorship, and helping to preserve cultures. Above all Globalisation has become a powerful weapon against prejudice by widening global interaction and, thereby facilitating multiculturalism.

On the downside, Globalisation, where it is not properly harnessed, can impart negative and destructive knowledge to the youth, discourage education, and make our world a more selfish and violent place. The destruction of our common habitat, through disastrous environmental practices cannot also be dismissed. The unprecedented cold blasts all over Europe and the on-going World Summit on the Environment in Cancun are pertinent reminders of this challenge.

Instant transfer of practices and cultures are producing very similar behavioural attitudes among the youth worldwide. The inner city gun and knife culture in London is not dissimilar to the cultism practised by students in African universities. In the conflicts that devastated countries, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, in the 1990s, the foot soldiers of the warlords were child soldiers, marginalised youth some as young as eight, who were

deprived hope and saw no alternative to their life of deprivation.

Today, some of the hard drugs that the youth indulge in the North transit through West Africa from Latin America. The army of unemployed and unemployable youth in West Africa play the role of 'mules', ferrying the drugs across dangerous terrain for promised rewards. Locally, drug consumption is also on the rise. Even the young people who shun violence and drugs may not necessarily see education as a viable route to 'acceptable' livelihood, for reasons related to poverty or idealism. Their role models are super-rich footballers, artistes and gangsters, whose images and lifestyles on TV and cinema screens intrude recreational centres and the privacy of homes in all corners of the world. They may see sport and entertainment not as complementary to, or as a product of education, but as an absolute alternative to it.

The impacts of the triple global crises – food, fuel and financial - that afflicted the world from 2007 through 2008, have made matters even worse with regard to education for the marginalised. The resources that had been pledged to shore up education and development in deprived societies are being diverted to save multilateral corporations in the North and rescue sinking nations in Europe. The stories of Greece and Ireland, the debate around increasing university tuition fees to

9000 pounds in the UK, and the cutbacks in overseas development assistance, are symptomatic of the malaise. The economies in the West Africa region were growing at an average rate of 6 percent, putting the countries on course to meet the 7 percent target needed to meet the MDGs by 2015, before the onset of the crises.

In light of the foregoing, Ladies and Gentlemen, it has become absolutely necessary to prioritise access to education as a fundamental human right. To mitigate the negative impacts of Globalisation on the youth, the international community must lead the way by insulating education from the ongoing austerity measures. We, as institutions, communities and individuals must also contribute our quota. It is against this backdrop that I consider the tasks that *Attaining the Peak* has set itself – to rescue and mentor the underprivileged through education and livelihood skills – as a noble and praiseworthy endeavour. But how do we reconceptualise education as a rescue project for the youth?

IV. Youth and the Education Challenge

Distinguished Students,
Reharping the virtues of education to you is like preaching to the converted, because your conviction in the power of education has brought you here. However, I wish to begin my

discourse by reemphasising the centrality of knowledge to our very survival as peoples of a world characterised by interconnectedness, mutual fears and aspirations. Life is about wishes and expectations, dreams and reality, doubts and certainties, fear and determination. It is also about the choices we make aimed at maximising optimism and minimising pessimism within ourselves, the community we live in, in our nations and in our global village. Education, which starts in the family, is refined and consolidated in school and enriched by life experiences, is the key to unlocking the creative potential in us, building our confidence and self-esteem, and banishing gloom in our lives.

As young people starting out in life, education provides that quantum leap in your sense of worthiness and self-esteem by equipping you with a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy, and research and analysis, which are so vital for arousing the curiosity and analytical thinking in us. It enables us, through cognitive and emotional intelligence, to apply acquired knowledge and skills to transform reality around us for self advancement and the betterment of society. In short, education empowers us and unveils our hidden leadership qualities.

1. Global Demographic Trends the Imperative of Education

Ladies and Gentlemen

Current demographic trends that suggest longer post-pension life spans in the North and a youth bulge in the South make the need to continually reproduce a workforce inevitable, and render education imperative. Here are a few revealing statistics:

- In the developing world, the youth constitute the vast majority of the population. In the Caribbean, young people under 30 make up two-thirds of the population.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing, perhaps, the greatest population bulge in the world, with an average annual growth of some 3.5 percent. In 1975, its population stood at 313.1 million, By 2004 it had reached almost 690 million and it is projected to hit 877.4 million by 2015, with almost 40 percent concentrated in the urban areas, according to the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report.
- In 2004, about 44 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population was under 15. West Africa's stands at about 45%, compared to 28 percent in Brazil, 33 in India, 34 in Malaysia, and 35 in Algeria, against an average of about 15% in developed countries.
- The population of West Africa, where I come from, was 120 million in 1975; Nigeria's population alone stands at 144 million. The population in the region is projected to increase to 430 million by 2020!

It is obvious from the above that, in order to scale up growth and improve the quality of life in these parts of the world, the 'right to quality and skills-based education' must transcend the realm of a mere clarion call into that of concrete and practical action. According to the 2006 Human Development Report, youth literacy rates (within the 15-24 age bracket) is impressive across Africa at around 71 percent. However, these quantitative aggregates mask the serious quality deficiencies and discrepancies based on gender, region, religion, traditions and social status. They also do not tell the full story of the dearth of employment opportunities for the youth, which at times make education unattractive to them. Thus, female youth literacy rate is 64 percent, which equates to only 86 percent of male youth literacy. Equally, youth unemployment is between 60 and 70 percent. According to the UNESCO 2010 EFA Monitoring Report, 50 percent of young adults in Burkina Faso, a Sahelian State, have fewer than two years of schooling while in the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria, 97 percent of poor Hausa-speaking girls have fewer than two years education!

I can assure you that Africa, with the proper strategies, is capable of generating enough resources and skills, from within and in its Diaspora, to meet the exigencies of the youth bulge and development. That is the challenge today.

V. ECOWAS and the Education Challenge

Distinguished Lectures, Researchers and Students,

Permit me in conclusion to return to the subject of ECOWAS and to share with you a few words about what the Organisation is doing to meet the education and youth empowerment challenges.

ECOWAS is guided in this domain by its Protocol on Education and Training, which was adopted in 2002. It considers the full development of human resources as a prerequisite for the resolution of the socio-economic problems confronting the region, and sets the objectives of promoting literacy and numeracy, girl-child education, and training for women as priority goals in the regional integration process. The Protocol commits Governments to eliminate the constraints preventing nationals of Member States, both men and women, from having access to quality education for all, and to ensure that girls in particular gain full access to all levels of the educational system.

In the efforts to implement its youth and women empowerment policies, ECOWAS has established a Gender Development Centre in Senegal and a Youth Centre in Burkina Faso, with

programmes aimed at empowering these critical but vulnerable segments of our society. ECOWAS has also established a Youth Volunteer Programme under which, youth from across the region are trained in leadership and other life skills and, thereafter, deployed in post-conflict countries to assist in reconstruction. The Organisation has also signed memoranda of understanding with established research institutions in the region and beyond to build the capacities of young people. As a case in point, under the MOU signed between ECOWAS and King's College of London, young women drawn from the region are offered Masters and Diploma courses and mentoring in peace and security and thereafter get attached to various departments engaged in the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture. ECOWAS is prepared to enter into similar arrangements with Oxford University for training and experience sharing.

VI. Conclusion

Distinguished Principals, Directors, Professors and Students

A pioneer Ghanaian educationist, Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, once said rather patronisingly but in a well-meaning way that "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation". Africa is turning the corner both in governance and economic development. Today, pessimism is

giving way to optimism throughout the continent, with skilled Africans in the Diaspora returning home in their numbers to contribute to this renewal. It is no exaggeration to predict that the continent will soon reverse the brain drain and become a net recipient of migrant labour. The youth constitute the motor required to maintain that momentum. To make this a reality, we all need to help them to attain the peak in education and leadership.

I thank you very much for the attention.