

Evaluating the Impact of Tertiary Institutions on Their Host Communities

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Abstract

Tertiary institutions are established principally to enrich the academic enterprise and enhance the socio-cultural and economic wellbeing of the larger society through applied research. These institutions have been acknowledged as powerful instrument for economic and social transformation of the localities where they are domiciled. Thus, the host communities are viewed as special places since they are availed of tremendous opportunities resulting from the influx of workers, their families and students. The paper identified some of the gains which include employment and admission, improved standard of living, attending affordable but qualitative staff nursery, primary and post- primary Schools, infrastructural development, basic social amenities and a host of others for the local populace. However, towns that host tertiary institutions are predisposed to unique challenges such as upsurge in crimes of various shades, high cost of living, pressure on available amenities, indecent dressing and clashes between these institutions and hosts communities which were non-existent prior to the establishment of these institutions. Based on these, challenges, the paper recommends among others that to sustain the rapport between “town” and “gown”, there is the need for increased communication, partnership and goodwill between these institutions and host communities as the gains of this relation are enormous.

Keywords: Tertiary institutions; Host Communities; Gains; Pains; Students; Synergy; Impact

I. Introduction

The significance of education is incontrovertible for the learned as well as the unlearned. It plays such an elementary but essential role in society that one cannot even visualize a life without education (Yusuf, 2014). According to him, education is a prominent propeller of the evolution and progress of human society. It helps both in the growth of healthy environment and engenders a more sophisticated and civilized society (Adayo, 2011). It is in fact the harbinger of development. Correspondingly, human creativity and innovativeness is predicated on scientific knowledge which is acquired via schooling (Dauda, 2010). Therefore, education has become the main engine for societal transformation. This is accentuated by the fact that its influence touches the socials, cultural, political and economic fabrics of the society. Education is the single instrument that has freed humans from the manacles of want, lack of knowledge, poverty and underdevelopment (Yusuf, 2014). According to Eze (2011), the establishment of tertiary institutions is anchored on four main concerns which are undergraduate education, graduate education, research, scholarship and innovativeness as well as community partnerships, outreach, and engagement. According to him, these constitute the cornerstones of tertiary institutions aimed at enriching the academic activity and stimulate the economic, social and cultural well-being of the society at large.

Communities that have tertiary institutions can be very exceptional places. Tertiary institutions are usually seen as an inducement in the host communities that magnetizes people and economic activities towards it (O,Flaherty, 2005). These communities, often known as “the town,” are presented with tremendous opportunities with the arrival of students each semester to begin or resume studies at colleges of education, polytechnics and universities, referred to as “the gown.”

The relationship between town and gown is a two-way traffic. The symbiotic relationship between tertiary institutions and host communities cannot be overemphasized (Olanrele and Awodoyin, 2011), taking into cognizance the contributions individual and groups make towards the establishment and continual growth of institutions domiciled in their communities. For example, Bello and Adebisi (2014) opined that communities provide land, worship centres, security, water, hospitals, and accommodation for students and staff etc.

It is an undeniable fact that tertiary institution situated in a particular town is always viewed or seen by the local populace as a catalyst for rapid socio-economic and infrastructural development. That is to say, the people's conviction is not unconnected with the belief that the establishment of these institutions ushers in an avalanche of benefits (Jenyo and Adebayo, 2013).

According to Eze (2011), some of these gains include the provision of employment for the local populace, admission for the indigenes, providing low-cost and reasonably priced educational services to the community (e.g. the qualitative nursery and elementary education provided through the staff School to the host communities), provision of facilities for use during events in the community (e.g. auditorium for functions, sports facilities etc), creating awareness on the relevance of education towards the socio-economic growth and development of those communities and making sure a large number of junior staff are engaged from the town and its environ where the institution is situated .

Despite these lofty and enviable gains/benefits tertiary institutions bring to bear on the host communities, there is a plethora of pains engendered by these institutions (Musa, 2009). Towns that host tertiary institutions are inclined to have unique problems such as exacerbation in crime (kidnapping, drug abuse, armed robbery, rape, cultism, burglary etc), excessive noise, public urination, indecent dressing, increased cost of living and pressure on basic social amenities. Notwithstanding these pains, the gains or benefits derived by the host communities as a consequence of the presence of tertiary institutions cannot be overemphasized. The appreciation of the gains associated with the location of tertiary institutions in a particular community is typified by the celebrations and fanfare that is displayed by the people as well as the fierce resistance when a decision is taken by the government to relocate such institutions. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts to critically evaluate the gains and pains experienced by the "Town" where the "Gown" (tertiary institutions) is located.

ii. Review Of Related Literature

a. The Positive Impact of Tertiary institutions on Host Communities: The Gains

There is no doubt that host communities where tertiary institutions are situated derive innumerable benefits directly or indirectly from the actions of these institutions. The broad attitude of the people has become automatically more urbane. There is a general swing from time-honored practices and beliefs to current ways of behaviour. Tertiary institutions have become vehicles of social, economic, cultural and infrastructural transformations (O'Mara, 2010). This is made possible by the desire and need for tertiary institutions to be socially responsible i.e. performing their corporate social responsibilities to host communities. There are a lot of benefits, both deserved and undeserved, both intended and unintended that host communities of tertiary institutions enjoy. Infact, most tertiary institutions are adjudged as 'good neighbours' by the town folks due to the enormous gains they enjoy (Wole and Banjo, 2013). Some of these gains in context are:

i. The Social Gains

Socially, the establishment of tertiary institutions has led to the emergence of new societies in the communities where they are domiciled. Traditional institutions, practices, norms, beliefs are considerably altered. In most communities that tertiary institutions are situated, there is a monumental reorganization and restructuring in their housing patterns, furniture, religious rites and rituals, conventional schooling, values, dreams and aspirations, which are in tandem with modernity (Odokara, 1978). Also, most host communities that had just one or two elementary and secondary schools before the establishment of tertiary institutions now boast of over 15 primary and post-primary schools due to the renewed consciousness of the relevance of education upon the arrival of workers employed with their families including students admitted by these institutions. This has led to explosion of literates (graduates) in these respective communities.

Furthermore, the establishment of tertiary institutions has led to the proliferation of religious bodies in the localities where they are sited. For instance, most communities prior to the establishment higher institutions of learning did not have churches or denominations. Beside shrines and other places of traditional worship, most of the contemporary churches and worship centres such as Redeemed Christian Church, Word of Life Bible Church, etc were totally absent. The upsurge in the number of churches and denominations was made possible by the influx of students and workers into these communities. This is so because almost all the clergy and members of the congregations are drawn from the university community. Again, a major benefit that host communities enjoy as a consequence of the presence of tertiary institutions in their communities is the growth and expansion of new areas and suburbs.

Sports development is another major area in which host communities have benefitted tremendously from these institutions. For example, a large number of the villagers utilize fields and stadia owned by institutions resident in their communities. Also, students and staff of these institutions are usually co-opted into local leagues, especially when there is a sporting competition between the host town and another. Additionally, most of these tertiary institutions have impacted positively on their host communities by establishing Daycare, Kindergarten, Nursery Schools, Primary and Post-primary Schools which are not restricted only to children of the staff of these schools but also made available to indigenes of the host communities at a considerable rate (Eze, 2011; Kalu, 2001; Solomon, 1990). The establishment of higher institutions also propels and motivates most people of the community to seek to achieve higher education which also results in an outstanding enhancement in their living standards as well as make them more refined. This is facilitated by the nearness of the schools to the people, thereby decreasing the cost of accommodation, feeding, and other necessities that would have frustrated or made it nearly impossible for some impoverished people to attend, especially when these institutions are located faraway.

ii. The Economic Gains

Economically, tertiary institutions have been the driver of economic activities in their host communities. To a large extent, all commercial activities are tied to the institutions in one way or the other. Before the establishment of these institutions in these communities, the degrees of economic/commercial activities were minimal. However, with the coming of these institutions, there was a dramatic reinvigoration, expansion and intensification in economic activities (Robert-Okah and Nyenwe, 2013). The influx of workers with their families including students led to the scarcity of goods and services. Consequently, the local population gave up their traditional mode of subsistence (peasant agricultural activities) and ventured into retail and wholesale businesses (Okoko, 2012).

The acknowledgement of tertiary institutions stimulating economic activities is undeniable considering the fact that the volume of sales is inextricably tied to staff salaries as well as students' patronage, especially when they are in session. It is an established fact that economic activities are at its peak when the semester begins and vice versa. Eze (2011) remarked that there is always an economic downturn during periods of holidays, strikes or obligatory evacuation of students from campuses due to labour or students' strife. The sudden increase in the population of the town ushered in by higher institutions also gave an impetus to other forms of businesses or enterprises such as supermarkets, banks, bars and restaurants, hotels and brothels, mechanic workshops, pool offices, event centres, fashion outlets, saloons and a host of others. Most of the patronage comes from workers, their families and students of these institutions. Also, most of the indigenes are employed in these business outfits as salesgirls/boys, supervisors, bar attendants, launders, waiters/waitresses, managers, and these employments have served as a means of livelihood for them.

iii. Entrepreneurial Activities

Again, it is an established fact that tertiary institutions also engage in commercial activities geared towards wealth maximization and employment generation (Eze, 2011). Most institutions set up businesses such as Computer Centres, Filling Stations, Bakeries, Printing Press, Information and Communication Technology Centres, Radio Stations, Distant Learning Centres, Transportation Services, Table/Sachet Water Outfits, Hotels/Guest Houses, Hospitals, Restaurants/Canteens etc. These outfits provide essential goods and services to staff and students and the local people. Besides, they provide jobs for them (host communities).

iv. Transportation Activities

A fundamental variable that plays a crucial function in the economic development of most communities is the existence of a dependable and well-organized transport arrangement. This emanates from the fact that an efficient and well structured transportation system presents sufficient access to the nation which is a sine qua non for the effective functioning of the economies of communities where higher institutions are located. Insufficient transportation system impedes the capacity of a country to exploit its God-given resources, as well as aid the distribution of goods and services. Suffice it to say that a most of these host communities never had functioning transport network. The inhabitants depended solely on foot and bicycles. Occasionally, motorcycles were used which was quite rare. As argued by Eze (2011), the free and steady flow of people in and out of communities where higher institutions are domiciled makes transportation a cardinal and basic part of these communities.

Consequently, a large number of people from these communities are involved in the transport business. Private-owned and public transport companies are on the increase because of the boom in the population of students and staff. It is clear that establishment of higher institutions of learning has generated millions of jobs for both residents and outsiders alike in these communities through riding of 'Okada' (bike riders), 'Keke-Napep' (tricycle), Taxi, Bus and even working as conductors in Taxis and Buses.

v. Infrastructural Development

A large number of communities where tertiary institutions are situated today were predominantly rural but the establishment of these institutions eventually led to the initiation and provision of essential basic amenities in these communities (Okoko, 2012; Ojo, 2006). For instance, infrastructural development is among the cardinal features of urbanization and the presence of higher institutions in communities has wittingly or unwittingly led to infrastructural development. Infrastructures such as roads, electricity, portable water, hospitals, communication facilities and a host of others are present in almost every community in which a tertiary institution is located.

b. The Negative Influence of Higher Institutions of Learning on Host Communities: The Pains

Notwithstanding the countless benefits enjoyed by host communities, there are also challenges associated with the location of tertiary institutions (Tobin, 2000). Some of the negative influence of these institutions on their host communities are cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, indecent dressing, high cost of living, primitive accumulation of wealth, residential burglaries, quality of life violations (public urination, excessive noise, littering, vagrancy, loitering etc), drug abuse, disorderly conduct, excessive alcohol consumption, prostitution, rape, sexual harassment, pressure on available social amenities, high value for landed properties as well as defilement the norms and values of the people (Kalu, 2001). Although, there was crime (stealing, burglary, etc) in these communities prior to the establishment of higher institutions however, it was intensified with the explosion in population which created room for anti-social behaviours facilitated by an atmosphere of anonymity and impersonality.

As the saying goes, evil communication corrupts good manner, most of the youths of the communities are lured into various nefarious activities perpetuated mostly by students from these institutions. That is, issues such as youth exuberance, indecent dressing, prostitution and other vices were not prevalent or in vogue among members of the localities (Ehinmowo and Eludoyin, 2010). Also, it is obvious currently that there is a resurgence in conflicts between tertiary institutions and their host communities with its attendant negative consequences on the general wellbeing of the staff, students and local population.

According to Wilson and Jibrin (2014), there are reported cases of fighting, maiming or killing of students by some unscrupulous elements in these communities. For instance, Iruoma (2012) reported that in October 2012, four (4) Students of the University of Port Harcourt were viciously sent to early graves by Aluu Vigilantes alleging that they were thieves; also, Vanguard Newspaper captured this title "Killing: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomosho seeks intensive surveillance of host community" due to the killing of a student by unidentified persons. In the same manner, Federal Polytechnic, Oko was shut down in April, 2012 due to a clash between students and the indigenes; the destruction of lives and properties at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) due to rampage by aggrieved youths of the community on 7 May, 2014 is another example. There are several cases where host communities exhibit dissent over appointment of institution's leadership which to a significant extent has contributed to bickering and outright demonstration by members of these communities (Amucheazi, 2012). These issues highlighted to a large extent bear on the general feeling of discomfort among the local populace who live, work, and pass through the community daily. This anxiety and apprehension usually transmute into an impediment between the locals and institutions.

iii. Conclusion and Recommendations

The establishment of tertiary institutions impacts overwhelmingly on the socio-economic and infrastructural development of their host communities. The most glaring benefits enjoyed by host communities are supply of labour, admission quota, infrastructural development, social amenities, attitudinal change and enhanced living standards among others. Regardless of these gains, host communities are also affected negatively in the areas of upsurge in crime, pressure on available social amenities, increased cost of living, adulteration of the value system, youthful exuberance, land scarcity and increase in rent, youths-students clash and a host of others.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, it is obvious that tertiary institutions have contributed tremendously to the socio-economic growth and development of their host communities. Thus, there should be a concerted effort to bridge the gown (tertiary institutions) and town (host communities) to ensure a speedy and holistic development as well as propagating an aura of mutual trust and responsibility. To sustain the synergy between the town and gown, there is need for improved communication, sincerity of purpose, and transparency between the institutions and host communities via the development of events such as sports which can bring the students and residents together in an atmosphere of mirth and interaction. Also, residents need to be convinced that their community is not at risk; It is not only a safe and secure environment, but also one in which they can work in conjunction with the student to achieve their academic goal and also help them to understand the significance of civic engagement. Moreover, employees of the institutions should encourage students to be more involved and work together not only on campus but in the surrounding communities. Additionally, management of higher institutions should devise 'community in the classroom' initiatives in their courses to enhance community building and community capacity.

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