

# **TALENT HUNT**

## **A BASIS FOR OPTIMUM HUMAN AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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# **TALENT HUNT: A BASIS FOR OPTIMUM HUMAN AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Every nation in the world is endowed, to one degree or the other, with human and material resources; which can be harnessed for the optimum development of the individual and best benefit to society. The environment provides opportunities and also poses challenges to man.

A particular environment may abound in material resources, for example, good soil, rich flora and fauna, minerals, abundant water, and so on. On the other hand, another environment may comprise almost an absolute challenge to man, for example, deserts, hilly or mountainous regions, and so on. In either case, man must interact with the environment in order to preserve it and put it to best use for himself and posterity.

The degree of success achieved by man in his interaction with the environment depends to great extent in the ability of society to develop its human resources and make the best use of the developed human abilities and potentials in harnessing the opportunities and challenges available in the environment. If a particular society achieves a very high degree of effective interaction with the environment, for example, Europe and North America, that society is described as developed. On the other hand societies that are still grappling with the environment, for example Nigeria, are described as developing.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1987) describes 'developing country' as "a poor country that is trying to build up its industry and improve the living conditions of its people". Even a cursory survey of the situation in developing nations shows that their problems span all aspects of life, social, economic and political. There is serious shortfall in the provision of the basic necessities of life such as food, good water, light, shelter, and so on. Basic social amenities are either inadequate or completely absent. In addition, there is a low level of industrial and technological development. On the whole, while the cost of living is high, the standard of living is very low.

In Nigeria, the characteristics of developing countries, particularly the few listed above, are easily observable. Nigeria has abundant human resources with tremendous potential. Also the country is blessed with enormous natural resources particularly oil. Yet the level of development (social, economic, technological and political) is very low. A number of explanations may be given for the poor level of development; however, it is our suggestion that all the observable factors of under-development in this country hinge on, among other situations, the under-development and underutilization of the nation's human resources.

It may be necessary to illustrate this point. In the field of engineering, for example, civil, mechanical, electrical, aeronautical, agricultural, and so on, Nigeria has persons with degrees from the first to doctorate, and professors. Yet all major engineering construction work and repairs in this

country are either done abroad or by foreigners. The country is littered with abandoned machinery due to lack of spare parts. The fabrication of machine parts in this country is still at its rudimentary stages. Thus, to talk of manufacture of machines will sound like talking of a trip to the moon.

Industrialization in Nigeria is at its most rudimentary stages. The few things turned out from the nation's industries, with the help of multinational set ups, are usually of inferior quality. The most important sector of the nation's economy, the oil industry, cannot survive without the input of foreigners. One can go on and on like this until every aspect of our economy is touched. What is the problem?

A glaring aspect of the problem is the underdevelopment and underutilisation of our human resources. There is no reason why an American or European or a Russian civil engineer, for example, can design, organize and supervise the construction of good, durable bridges while the Nigerian civil engineer cannot, if both undergo the same or similar training experiences. If the Nigerian professional could not perform tasks appropriate to his training, the explanation cannot be that after his training he suddenly degenerated to a level of capabilities inferior to that of his European or American counterparts. The most plausible explanation is that opportunities, and more importantly equipment and resources facilitative of optimum performance, are not available to the Nigerian professional. The net effect is under-employment or underutilization of talents and expertise.

Nigerian scientists and technologists view the results of science and technology in the advanced countries with extreme bewilderment. The gap between Nigeria and the developed countries in science and technology is so astonishing and staggering that the tendency for Nigerian scientists and technologists is to give up trying. While their counterparts in the developed countries are conquering the other planets, including red Mars, Nigerian scientists and technologists are grappling with the rudiments of the first industrial revolution.

It has been stated earlier that Nigeria is a developing country. However, it has tremendous human resources and material wealth, more than enough to enable her move, even rapidly into the community of developed nations. This has not happened and is not likely to happen in the near future. A pre-requisite for development of the nation is ability or talent hunt which includes the following:

1. Ability differentiation and personality identification.
2. A deliberate programme of talent development.
3. Proper placement.
4. Optimum utilization of talent.

### **Ability Differentiation**

Every individual is endowed with a degree of intelligence, aptitudes and some personality characteristics. Practically no aspect of human behavior or characteristic has escaped measurement by the test industry. That is to say, most human behaviours can be measured and clarified. This is

particularly good because optimum human development requires identification, training and proper utilization of human abilities.

**Intelligence:** Intelligence is a concept that has almost defied definition. Thorndike and Hagen (1977) stated that psychologists have never been able to agree very precisely on the meaning of "intelligence" or on exactly what it is does and does not include. However, a general trend in the widely accepted definitions indicates that intelligence is the individual's general capacity to understand the world about him and cope with its challenges (Wechsler 1975).

This definition views intelligence as a single phenomenon. It may be important to state that a current concept sees this psychological construct as multiple and no single. The greatest proponent of what is now known as Multiple Intelligences (MI) is Howard Gardner who is Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University, Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, and Adjunct Professor of Neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine. That is a Multiple Professor on Multiple Intelligences.

Gardner (1993, 2003) points to his efforts, which started twenty years ago, on the theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner claims that human persons possess not just a single intelligence (that is the 'g' factor): rather they have "a set of relatively autonomous intelligences". Hence for him it is

appropriate to talk of linguistic, logical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal, naturalist and, existential intelligences.

My assessment of Gardner's efforts to describe Multiple Intelligences is that, as much as the theory looks like an old wine in a new-look bottle; it is rewarding, in his own words, "to lay out this problematic so that other interested players can have their chance to engage" (Gardner 2003). For now I may look satisfied to continue to talk of mathematical, spatial, musical, linguistic, etc. aptitudes and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and competences. Of course, this seeming complacency on my part is absolutely due to the peculiar circumstances and situational constraints hampering research efforts in Nigeria. I shall dwell on this later.

Having gone this far, it may be helpful to state that our concern in this lecture is that certain levels of intelligence are required for success in specific occupations. While some occupations, for example, medicine and engineering, require very high levels of intelligence, others have tolerance for a broad spectrum of intelligence. Elsewhere, Ikeotunonye (1990) stated that even occupations which belong to the same cluster may require different levels of intelligence, for example, medical profession and nursing, teaching in a university and teaching in a primary school. Hence it is absolutely necessary to determine precisely the occupational level at which an individual can perform. Intelligence tests have been found to be of tremendous use in this respect. They are designed to measure an individual's general scholastic and occupational ability.

**Aptitude:** Intelligence tests can help to determine the occupational level at which an individual can perform but they are not useful in assessing an individual's specific aptitudes. The term 'aptitude' is used in its commonest sense to describe ability to acquire specific skills, knowledge or behavior; and aptitude tests are designed to predict an individual's future performance on any such specific abilities, for example, clerical, mechanical, musical, numerical and artistic aptitudes (Ikeotunonye, 1985). Shertzer and Linden (1979) have also stated that aptitude tests measure specific skills rather than academic attainment or general scholastic ability.

Thus for ability differentiation, there is need also for aptitude tests. Intelligence tests cannot tell you the occupational cluster in which an individual is most likely to perform better than others. Are the individual's strengths mechanical or clerical or artistic, and so on? This question is best answered by means of aptitude tests. Thus, in addition to knowing the occupational level appropriate to an individual's ability, it is also important to determine the occupational cluster appropriate to his strengths.

**School Achievement:** Ability differentiation for human development goes beyond determination of levels of intelligence and aptitudes. It also has to do with the readiness of the individual to benefit from the course of training leading to a desired occupation. The individual, for example, who would like to be a medical doctor would need an assessment of his school

attainment in relevant pre-vocational subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and English. Here comes the need for achievement tests.

Educational or attainment tests are designed to measure the outcome of effects of specific programmes of instruction, the progress students have made in attaining proficiency as a result of training or learning, for example, in a course in mathematics, English, and so on. Achievement tests represent a terminal evaluation of a student's status on the completion of a course or training. They can be of immense assistance in determining an individual's readiness for training in a desired occupation.

In all, therefore, ability differentiation for human development encompasses determination of the individual's level of intelligence, his strengths and weaknesses in terms of aptitudes, and his readiness to benefit from a course of instruction leading to a desired occupation. The importance of ability differentiation for effective human development cannot be over-emphasized.

### **Personality Identification**

The term 'personality' can be defined in various ways, the commonest definition being that it is the totality of behavior. This definition would include all the characteristics of the human person, intellectual, affective and psychomotor. According to Wallerstein (1964) the term personality is "used in various senses, both popularly and psychologically, the most

comprehensive and satisfactory being the integrated and dynamic organization of the physical, mental, moral and social qualities of the individual, as that manifests itself to other people, in the give and take of social life.....”.

In this lecture, the term is used to refer to the non-intellective or affective characteristics of an individual; for example, interests, emotions, attitudes, values, and so on.

It is note-worthy that a number of theories of vocational development and choice have made specific references to personality. Examples include the need theory of Roe (1957, 1972), the developmental theories of Super (1953) and Ginzberg et al (1952), and the topological theory of Holland (1959).

Mallum (1990) drew attention to Roe’s emphasis on the influence of the nurturing style of parents, during the individual’s childhood, on the interests and attitudes the individual develops later, which ultimately affect his career development and vocational choice. Roe (1957,1972), explained that those primary needs which were not well satisfied in early childhood by one’s parents become, later in life, strong motivating factors which drive one into developing some unique interests and attitudes, and also make one engage in various activities in order to satisfy those needs. It follows that the need which is of most concern to a person and the means through which he tries to satisfy that need determine the type of career or vocation the person chooses.

Ginzberg et al. (1952) also made specific references to personality as a factor in vocational development and choice. Among the variables listed as significantly involved in vocational choice were emotional factors and individual values. According to Ginzberg et al. emotional factors in the individual's responses to his environment are important since it seemed, on an intuitive basis, that personality and emotional factors should have vocational concomitants. It was also stated that individual values are deemed to be important in vocational choice. Values influence the quality of choice by virtue of the differing values in various careers.

The thrust of Super's (1953) theory is that vocational development is a process of implementation of the individual's self-concept. Super et al. (1963) contended that individuals in a given vocation share common personality traits and needs. Self-concept, in particular, is identified as a determinant of vocational choice.

Olufeagba (1990) stated that the central idea of Holland's theory of vocational choice is that people take to occupations in environments congruent with their personality dispositions. In fact, Holland (1959, 1966, 1973) proposed a classification of people into six personality types and of environment into six corresponding categories: realistic, intellectual, social, conventional, enterprising and artistic. A major proposition of this theory is that people search for environments and vocations that will permit them to exercise their skills and abilities, to express their attitudes and values, to take on agreeable problems and roles, and to avoid disagreeable ones.

Elsewhere (Ikeotuonye 1986, 1990) I wrote emphatically on the importance of assessment of personality as a condition for optimum development and utilization of talent. Attention was drawn to unethical behaviours of some nurses and medical doctors; and a suggestion was made that if assessment of personality was made part of the selection and training processes, the dangerous nurses and doctors would have been weeded out somewhere along the line.

A study by one of my doctoral students (Ojiah, 1998) investigated the personality characteristics and vocational interests of medical doctors in hospitals in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Two of the interesting findings are:

1. The dominant personality characteristics of 56 percent of the sample medical doctors were not those considered appropriate for the profession.
2. Fifty percent of the doctors did not possess in good measures vocational interests considered appropriate for the profession.

The natural conclusion is that nobody may expect such misfits or dangerous doctors to contribute optimally to human and national development. In fact, many of them may be pulling in the opposite direction.

## **School Testing Programme**

At this point, it may be assumed that the importance of ability differentiation and personality clarification, as major components of talent hunt, has been properly discussed. The next natural step to take is to discuss how the two can be achieved. Ability differentiation and personality clarification are easily achievable by means of an effective school testing programme. Elsewhere, Ikeotuonye (1985) gave a diagrammatic aptitude testing schedule for the 6-3-3-4 system of education. That schedule is recommended as it is. What needs to be done is to work into it intelligence, achievement and personality tests. The envisaged total programme is shown in figure I below. It can be modified to suit any prevailing circumstances.

Levels	Intelligence	Aptitude	Achievement	Personality
Primary 1	x			
2				
3				
4				
5				x
6		X	x	
JSS 1	X			
2				
3		X	x	
SSS 1	x			
2				x
3		X	x	
Tertiary 1	X			
2				
3				
4				

**Figure 1**

**A schedule of School Testing Programme**

It may be necessary now to remind ourselves that pointers are being drawn to the components of what has been named talent hunt, considered a prerequisite for individual and national development. We shall move on to the next component, namely, development of talent.

## **Development of Talent**

Once ability differentiation and personality clarification and hence identification of talent have been achieved, the next logical objective is development of talent. Nature is so kind that most human characteristics are normally distributed. Take intelligence, for example, the range of its distribution is from the less intelligent through average to genius. The implication is that society must provide developmental facilities for all groups of its citizens. There are appropriate occupational activities for all categories of people in the society. Individuals who have abilities to keep the society clean and healthy should be given the opportunities to develop those abilities and potentials to their best levels. Similarly, other persons who have the aptitudes to provide the technological needs of society should be encouraged to optimize the development of their potentials. Yet other persons who have the genius to interact with the moon and the planets should be given the enabling environment for their contributions to society.

In Nigeria, facilities for formal education exist. However, they are far from adequate, particularly at the tertiary level, for the hundreds of thousands of people in quest of education. The inadequacy of educational facilities is not the concern here. As already indicated the thrust of this paper is a demonstration of the need to identify talent and provide opportunities for individuals to optimize the development of their potentialities, so that they can make the best contributions to national development.

The untutored mind may quickly snap out a remark to the effect that both the Federal and State governments have schemes for scholarship and other types of awards for students. This is peripheral to the idea of talent hunt that is the concern in this paper. To my best knowledge, Nigeria's educational system has no specific programme for ability differentiation and talent identification. What exists is a system of continuous assessment and examinations meant to determine which students will move from one school level to another, and which students will be given certificates at the completion of appropriate levels of education.

This assessment process is not useful in any real sense for ability differentiation and talent hunt. Hence most scholarships and other awards in this country are based on unclarified criteria and often on personal intervention variables. What is being emphasized is that Nigeria's educational system has not got any clearly marked out testing programme for ability differentiation and identification of talent. This implies that the uncoordinated, erratic attempts by government at identification and education of some children tagged 'gifted' cannot yield any results different from those achieved in the entire school system. In almost all the cases the end result was that the 'gifted' children obtained mostly A's in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE). It is known, however, that an appreciable proportion of children not labeled 'gifted' in the secondary schools also obtain mostly A's; and naturally so because they fall in at the right extreme of the normal distribution of abilities. How do we then assess the gifted children programme in Nigeria?

## **The Gifted Children Programme**

There is a hazy recognition of the need to give special attention to talent hunt in Nigeria. In the National Policy on Education – Revised (1981) it is stated:

*There are also the specially gifted children who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy in resistance to it. Government has already directed that all children, including the gifted as well as those with physical, mental and learning difficulties, must be provided for under the educational system. The corollary of UPE, therefore, is that special education arrangements must be made for the handicapped and the exceptionally gifted (p.36)*

In this same National Policy on Education it is stated that one of the objectives of special education is to provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development. It is further stated that the

education of gifted children will be free at all levels, up to the University level where possible.

In response to the stated policy a 'Workshop on Education for Nigerian Gifted and Talented children' was organized at the National Teachers Institute, Kaduna from June 28 to July 5, 1986.

In the resultant proceedings (1985) it is stated:

*The major outcome of the workshop was the Blueprint which, it is hoped, will serve as a guide to policy formulation on the identification and nurturing of the gifted in Nigeria (p.14)*

The blueprint which was ready by December 1986 is a commendable document whose guidelines on the education of gifted and talented persons can serve as a framework for more indepth and informed document resulting from research rather than literature review alone. One very obvious weakness of the blueprint is the heavy leaning on political considerations in providing guidelines for the selection of gifted and talented children. In fact, this particular weak point is mainly responsible for reducing the only federal government school for the education of gifted and talented children, Suleja Academy, to just one of the federal government colleges. The Suleja Academy took off on May 25, 1990.

A visit to the school, a study of the students Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) results, and a discussion with the Principal and a number of teachers revealed the following:

1. The selection process has resulted in admitting persons who had to be advised to find places in other secondary schools because they could not pass the promotion examinations.
2. The students' performance in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) is good but not better than that of students in other top federal government colleges.
3. The education of the "gifted and talented persons" stops with the SSCE. Once the students leave the school, it is over.
4. The teaching and learning facilities in the school are just similar to those in the other federal government colleges.
5. The school environment is like what we have in other federal government colleges.
6. Recruitment of teachers is similar to what obtains in other federal government colleges.

It may be helpful, in illustrating the point being made, to draw attention to the fact that the principal of the Suleja Academy cried out recently in 1997, on television that it was extremely disturbing that children tagged gifted were brought to the Academy to be wasted. Thus, like other government secondary schools all over the country, the Suleja Academy has been abandoned to its fate. It is unfortunate.

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, has also started a secondary school for the gifted at Gwagwalada. The school took off in the 1994/95 academic year, specifically on March 14, 1994. The first set selected from students in FCT secondary schools whose performance was high in the junior Secondary School Examination, sat for the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in May/June 1997. The students' results are just as good as what obtains in federal government colleges. The results of the subsequent years, to date, are also similar.

While the efforts by the federal government and the Federal Capital Territory may be described as commendable, a number of questions readily come to mind.

1. Is the selection of students into the gifted schools gifted
2. Is the selection of teachers for the schools gifted?
3. Are the programmes run in the schools gifted?
4. Is there really anything gifted about the gifted schools?

The recommendation here is that research should be initiated immediately in order to answer these questions. A swift observation and a cursory examination of the total situation in the two schools show that the answers to all four questions are in the negative. However, I shall be enormously delighted if indepth research proves me wrong.

## **The Need for Proper Placement of Talents**

A pre-requisite for development and maximum utilization of human resources is proper placement. This paper is giving it prominence because it is one area that is crying for attention in our educational and occupational behavior. An example of behavior at the extreme of the problems of inadequate placement facilities in Nigerian Secondary Schools is the story I narrated (Ikeotuonnye 1983) of a boy in a secondary school who wrote his illiterate mother listing all the subjects done in the school. The mother was to take the list to an oracle for the priest to pinpoint those subjects he would study with success. This poor boy was asking for proper placement in one of the alternative leanings available in the school, namely, science, arts, commercial and technical. Of course, the oracle was the source of help readily available. The school had no placement service that could generate confidence in the students.

Olufeagba (1990) state that:

*the placement service comprises the systematic assistance given to students in developing realistic goals and choices related to their educational and vocational future. It also includes helping students select and make the best use of the educational and vocational opportunities available to them (p.224)*

Olufeagba's advice is that the school placement programme should serve explicitly stated needs. The main thrust or objective is the channeling of talents to their appropriate places. It is known that students enjoy schooling when they engage in activities consonant with their interests, abilities and personality characteristics. According to her, proper placement is a pre-requisite for individuals to make the best use of their potentials, be it in school or in the world of work.

There is no doubt at all that placement in our school system is a haphazard affair. The situation in the work world in Nigeria is even worse. In the public sector, employment is largely based on personal intervention variables; and, of course, input and productivity in that sector are extremely low. There may be reason to believe that some acceptable placement procedures are in use in the private sector whose aim is usually maximization of productivity. The recommendation is that if Nigeria wishes to join the community of developed countries, rigorous placement services must be in operation in both the public and private sectors.

It may be helpful to point out that one major factor hampering proper placement in schools and in the world of work in Nigeria is what is popularly called quota system (more appropriately called equal opportunities method of selection) (Ikeotuonye 1986). I am an advocate of the quota system. However, what is extremely disturbing is that it has been most severely abused and misused. Its application has in most cases

resulted in the placement of square pegs in round holes. With this situation, productivity is not really taken serious in the public sector.

The unregulated use of the quota system in the selection of persons into secondary and tertiary institutions of learning has not only hampered talent identification and development, but also the advancement of national unity and cohesion. For example, an informal interview of some children revealed the following:

1. Children, born and bred in a particular State who were subjected to a cut-off point higher than that of children described as indigenous to the same State felt very bitter.
2. They also started feeling and behaving superior to the other children
3. The other children naturally felt insulted, angry but inferior.

You can imagine the kind of relationship that existed between the two groups of children thereafter. Thus, quota has inadvertently added another serious dimension to the ethnic problem in Nigeria.

Two separate studies were carried out (Ikeotunonye 1987, 1982) which among other things explored experiential differences in tested aptitudes. In one of the publications resulting from those studies (Ikeotunonye 1986) a clear reference was made to the contentious issue in Nigeria of the use of the quota system in selecting students into institutions of learning. It is stated:

*If we can for once remove crude politics from this debate, it becomes clear from the findings of this study that the quota system of selection should be adopted in order to spread equal educational opportunities to all ethnic groups and to all areas in Nigeria (p.93).*

Thus, it is very clear that I support equal opportunities method of selection. However, the point of caution is that it must be regulated in order not to hamper proper placement which is a pre-requisite for optimum human resources development.

### **Optimum Utilization of Talent**

Optimum utilization of human resources requires the provision of enabling environment for maximum performance. An enabling environment will include a work place conducive to a very high level of productivity. There should be adequate supply of equipment and other work materials. One of the most intractable problems hampering performance and productivity in Nigeria is lack of equipment and other work materials. Even when the equipment is there, it may be out of order or in a very bad state of disrepair. Almost all government set-ups; offices, research centres, workshops, universities, primary and secondary schools, fire service, airports, seaports, hospitals and so on, are without necessary equipment. Even a moron knows that a genius without equipment is rendered incapable.

Two of the basic requirements in any place of work are electricity and water. In the advanced countries that we would like our nation to be like, these necessities are taken as given. They are forever there. The worker does not waste his or her thinking time on how to cope with lack of power and water. In Nigeria a great deal of thinking time and energy goes to worries about power and water. Incredible losses and damage often result from erratic power and water supply. Of course, countless working hours go to waste once power and water disappear, sometimes for months.

It is possible to go on and on describing the need for an enabling environment and facilities for optimum productivity. However, only one illustration will be given. I undertook a project to produce an Ahmadu Bello University Differential Aptitude Tests (ABU-DAT). The American version of the Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT) is one of the best known instruments in the world for ability differentiation. The writer carried through the M.Ed. and PhD theses (Ikeotunonye 1978, 1982), designed to achieve this purpose, with mostly his personal resources. Thereafter, all efforts to secure fund to carry the project to its logical end failed. The only possibility left was to make the results of the project, so far achieved, available to the reading public. This was done in a number of journal publications: Ikeotunonye 1985, 1986 and 1988, Ikeotunonye and Gambari 1990, and Ikeotunonye 1992. If any person or group of persons has the resources to carry on the project, my free advice and cooperation are readily available. This experience narrated is enough to show that as long

as the Nigerian worker retains the image of a farmer without tools, both individual and national development will remain a dream.

Please forgive me; the intention was to give only the above illustration. However, this next one is equally interesting. The writer was asked to head a research team at the Department of Education, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria whose assignment was the development of Ahmadu Bello University Achievement Test Series (ABU-ATS) for secondary schools. The proposal was written, a portion of which contained assignment of responsibilities. The Nigerian 'factor' set in. The Head of Department, who initiated the project, was removed in an administrative reshuffle that took place. That was the end of the project. It was a natural death for it.

It may be of interest to you to know that the 'triple' professor referred to earlier acknowledged (Gardner 2003) how a foundation made it possible for him to carry out an extensive research programme on Multiple Intelligences. He also made reference to their efforts in a project whose aim was to produce tasks for the assessment of multiple intelligences. He also made reference to their efforts in a project whose aim was to produce tasks for the assessment of multiple intelligences. According to him, they "learned that creating assessments is a difficult task and one that requires a great investment of money and time". Will it ever be possible to have a government or a foundation in Nigeria ready to make 'a great investment of money' so that people like us can make a great investment of time and energy in projects meant to help to achieve optimum human and national development?

You may reason with me that given the resources, if I could not become a triple professor, at least I could have become a 'double' professor, one of counseling psychology, and two of psychological testing. I tell you solemnly, there is a number of triple and double professors in Nigeria that never were.

Some of you may be familiar with the story of Greg Smith, an American, who at the age of 14 is taking a PhD in Mathematics at the University of Virginia, U.S.A.; and intends to take PhD in three other areas. One other aspiration of his is to become the President of the United States of America. Greg Smith is described as a genius whose intelligence quotient (IQ) places him in the top 25 percent of the top one percent. You and I know that if Greg Smith were a Nigerian, the probability that he might walk this planet un-noticed and die unsung was very high indeed.

A very important ramification of optimum utilization of talent lies in the realm of conditions of service. It is not enough to place individuals in appropriate work roles. There is need for appropriate levels of motivation and reinforcement. If the conditions of service are not commensurate with the expected work roles, input and productivity will slump. Genius can be terribly hampered by hardship, problems, difficult environment, lack of motivation, and other similar factors.

It is easily observable that one most debilitating factor operating on workers in Nigeria is poor remuneration for their work roles. It does not require any research for anybody to see that over 99 percent of public sector workers in Nigeria are pre-occupied with the basic necessities of life, with little or no hope for the future. The conditions of service for these workers leave them perpetually gaping at life at starvation, or at best subsistence, point.

Maslow (1954) came out with a hierarchy of human needs, namely:

1. Physiological need
2. Safety need
3. Need for love and belongingness
4. Need for esteem
5. Need for knowledge
6. Need for beauty
7. Need for self-actualisation

The sets of needs listed are arranged in order of importance, starting from lowest order needs to the highest order ones. According to Maslow (1954) as one set of need is gratified, the next to it in the hierarchy emerges and becomes a strong motivator in the individual and urges for its own accomplishment.

The situation in Nigeria is that over 80 percent of the population is perpetually clogged up and stranded at the lowest order need. They engage in non-stop search for food, water, clothes, shelter, energy, light,

medicine, and so on, from birth to the grave. In striving to satisfy these lowest order needs, a large proportion of the population does not even bother about safety. As the days pass, the situation gets worse. From the mid 1980's, university professors, well-read scientists and technologists and their like have got buried deep into the over 80 percent of Nigerians forever condemned to satisfaction of the lowest order needs. If a professor of engineering, for example, does not have to worry about the basic necessities of life, he can spend endless hours in his workshop trying to arrive at one invention or the other. However, it is known that for the Nigerian professor what engages most of his or her thinking time is how to provide the basic necessities of life for himself and his family. While his counterparts in the advanced countries are interacting with the planets, he is stranded at subsistence point of life.

At this point, it is morally necessary to give credit to the Obasanjo government for improving the take-home pay of Nigerian workers. However, the present situation is still not good enough to liberate the average Nigerian worker from the proverbial chicken behavioural tendencies. The Nigerian proverbial chicken complains that its major source of concern is that once it wakes up in the morning, it will start picking food for its god, then for the god of bad luck, and by the time it starts picking food for itself, it would be sun-down; and it would retire for sleep. The following day, it starts the process all over again; and this happens from birth to grave. Thus, it is pretty obvious that the general situation in Nigeria drastically narrows the scope of

experiential/environmental opportunities and healthy challenges facilitative of development and utilization of human abilities and potentials.

It is pretty certain that listeners and readers will value an assessment of Nigeria's so-called space programme. This assessment has been succinctly provided by the Economist (2003). It is stated:

*Nigeria's first satellite, a box of gadgets the size of a washing machine, will be launched into space from Siberia. It was built by a British firm for the Nigerian government, and will cost \$13m. Such a sum would barely buy you a sandwich on the international space station, but to Nigerians, it sounds a lot, and many are wondering if the money is being wisely spent (p.62).*

It is interesting that some other people's assessments, of Nigeria's erratic and unimpressive scratch at science and technology, are similar to mine. The Economist (2003) again states:

*The government says the satellite will help Nigeria "leap-frog" from its present state (awful roads, telephones that rarely work), into the space age. But Sam Chukwujekwu, an engineering professor, thinks the money would be better spent on education. "You*

*can't leap-frog from a mud foundation", he says (p.63).*

I would like to add that Professor Chukwujekwu must be a very kind person to grant Nigeria "a mud foundation". As far as I know, there is no foundation at all. There is need to start from the scratch; and to start from the scratch is to start from talent hunt.

### **Institute for Talent Hunt**

Without doubt there is hope for the future; however, the end of the tunnel is definitely far. The journey through the tunnel has been haphazard. There is need for stock-taking and starting all over again. There must be a deliberate policy of talent hunt. A Nigerian proverb states that if a wild animal being hunted runs in a peculiar way, a peculiar arrow must be used to hit it. This should start by setting up an institute for talent hunt which may be called Nigerian Institute for Talent Hunt (NITH) Selection of persons who will work in the institute should not have anything at all to do with state of origin, ethnic group, religion, nationality or race. The appropriate persons should be recruited from any part of the world where they are available. This is the practice in the advanced counties of the world.

It is recommended that the professionals, needed in the institute, should include the following:

1. Psychometricians whose major responsibility is the development of tests of intelligence, aptitude, achievement and personality. With the tests, developed on and for Nigerians, it will be very easy indeed to identify talents and clarify their abilities.
2. Counsellors and clinical psychologists whose responsibilities include administration, scoring and collation of test results, and counseling on placement of talents.
3. Eminent educationalists whose duties include development of school testing programmes, placement of talents, recruitment of teaching staff, development of courses of instruction, supervision of instruction, assessment of students' performance, and so on.
4. Research professors whose major responsibilities include research into the education of gifted children, and evaluation of the activities and programmes of the institute. Their researches should contribute most to the data bank in the institute.
5. Eminent scientists and technologists whose contributions will include construction, procurement, and maintenance of equipment for the institute and its school and university.
6. Specifically talented and gifted teachers for the school and university of the institute.

7. Highly skilled artisans who will ensure that the environment and facilities of the institute are kept in the best form.
8. Others whose services may be needed.

It is very important to state that the salaries and conditions of service of the employees should be among the best anywhere in the world. Payments maybe in dollars, pound sterling or Euro. The conditions of service in the institute should be able to attract the best talents from all over the world.

It is advised that the institute should have one comprehensive secondary school and one university, all located in the institute. This will facilitate interaction and research. The university, of course, can only take off six years after the takeoff of the secondary school. Only graduates from the institute's secondary school will be admitted into the University. The quota system of selection must not apply to the institute. Again, once the secondary school takes off, all so-called schools for the gifted must change over to normal secondary schools. No state should be allowed to set up any school purported to be for the gifted.

What has been written here about the proposed Nigerian Institute for Talent Hunt (NITH) is meant to provide a skeleton for further reasoning. It is just not possible to state in this lecture everything that should be written. Some untutored minds may see the proposal as ideal. It is not.

In fact, what is proposed here is what has taken place, or is existing, in one form or another in the advanced countries that we would want to be like. All the huge unnecessary investments ploughed into duplication of universities, unproductive research centres and institutes, and other similar ventures should be used for setting up the proposed institute. Once it is set up, the numerous research and development centres should dissolve into it over time. In any case, if Nigeria really wants to wake up from its endless science and technological slumber, she has no alternative to adopting a radical approach to her development efforts. The prize for not doing this is to continue to talk about and view science and technology with bewilderment onto the end of this twenty-first century.

## **Summary**

Nigeria is a country observably rich in human and natural resources. Yet she is underdeveloped; and indications are that she will remain so even to the end of this twenty-first century unless a very deep, reasoned, radical approach to development is devised. The approach proposed is talent hunt in all its ramifications; ability differentiation and personally identification, a deliberate programme of talent development, proper placement and optimum utilization of talent. In order to implement this proposal rapidly, there is need to establish an institute for talent hunt; which may be called Nigerian Institute for Talent Hunt (NITH). This institute must be run without any reference at all to state of origin, ethnic group, religion, nationality or race. Finally, the prediction is that unless the recommended approach, or another similar to it, is used , Nigerians will continue to talk

about and view science and technology with awe onto the end of this twenty-first century at the nearest.

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