

**Guest Lecture Delivered by
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**at the 63rd Annual Meeting of the West
African Examinations Council (WAEC)
on the Theme:**

**“What Else Are We Writing on the Slate?
A Call for a Holistic Preparation of the
Youth.”**

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The Permanent Secretary and Representative of His Excellency, The Governor of Lagos State;

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Mr. John Gayvolor, Sr.

Head of the National Office, Liberia;

Other Heads of WAEC National Offices;

Chief Government Nominees of WAEC Countries;

Members of the Boar of the WAEC Endowment Fund;

Distinguished Educators of West Africa;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

In early February 2015, when I received a letter dated 26th January from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) informing me that the 39th Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Endowment Fund held on January 21, 2015 had unanimously approved my nomination by the Liberia Administrative & Finance Committee of WAEC as the Speaker for the 20th Annual Lecture, conflicting emotions welled up in my mind. On the one hand, I was excited to have been conferred such a great honor by one of our regions highly venerated organizations to speak at its annual assembly, which brings together distinguished educators and intellectuals whose collective interest is to promote the culture of excellence among the young people of West Africa through credible examinations. On the other, I was overwhelmed with trepidation because when I viewed the star-studded line-up of previous speakers, many of whom with prefixes such as "Prof.", "Dr." before their names, I could not help but feel like I was venturing into a terrain where, to paraphrase Alexander Pope, only angels can dare to tread.

In any case, I extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to the entire WAEC family for my selection as the Guest Speaker at this 20th Annual Lecture. I have not come to compete with the erudition and eloquence of my distinguished predecessors, but I have come to do only one thing: share my humble thoughts on some issues I hold dear and leave the pundits and commentators to do what they know best.

My Personal Experience With WAEC

Before I advance further, please permit me to take a walk on memory lane in order to bring to the fore the very huge impact WAEC has had on my own life. In the 1980s and even now news about WAEC and the itsdreaded exams generate huge attention in the media and among grade school students in Liberia. I too followed the activities of WAEC very closely, especially the press conferences of then Head of the Liberia National Office, Ms. Grace Morris during which Ms. Morris would announce the results of the annual WAEC examinations. She would usually give statistics on the general performance of all the students who took the test; the schools that performed very well across the country as well as the top threestudents who excelled in the nationwide exams. Ms. Morris press

conference was, in essence, an opportunity to know the "*Who's Who*" in the Liberian school system.

During those years, WAEC had a tradition of presenting *Merit Award for Academic Excellence* to the top three students in the previous year's exam at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion to coincide with the award of prizes for the best performing schools during the annual National Flag Day parade on August 24. The ceremony, broadcast live on radio and carried on national TV, was followed religiously by students and parents all across the country.

Every young student of substance craved for the opportunity to receive a Merit Award from WAEC on National Flag Day. I too wished that I could one day be put on WAEC's pedestal of honor. Accordingly, when I enrolled at the Booker Washington Institute (BWI), an academic-vocational high school, one of my consuming passions was to bring honor to myself and my school by performing with flying colors on the WAEC exams. This was the dream whose flames kept burning in my heart as I traversed those difficult years on BWI. I worked very hard to fulfill my dream by utilizing my time well, associating with good friends, and taking inspiration from quality

teachers, many of whom were truly extraordinary. They were my mentors and they pushed me really hard to excel, even giving me extra reference materials to read and customized practice test drawn from those extra materials.

On the actual date of the exam sometime in October 1989 as we were being called into the exam hall to begin, I remember that I became overwhelmed with nervousness. In fact, for the first ten minutes or so after we were told to start answering the questions, my hand actually trembled as I tried to solve the first few questions on the Mathematics portion of the exam. Indeed, after years of difficult preparations, when this make or break day finally came, it put me on an emotional tight rope. Luckily, my internal tensions simmered down, and I was able to go through the day with calm. After the exams, I did not know what to expect. For sure, I knew I would make a clean pass but was not too sure whether I would emerge as one of the top performers. I scaled down my expectations after the exam, and therefore could not cope with the positive emotions that permeated my entire being when the results were finally issued – I emerged as the third best performer on the nationwide exam,

trailing closely behind two Indian students who had earned a combined score of 320 and 313 respectively as compared to mine of 311.

In line with the time-honored tradition, I avidly looked forward to the next Flag Day Celebrations in 1990 where I would have been one of the students to receive the Merit Award from WAEC, which we had earned a year earlier. But fate would have something else in store for us. On December 24, 1989, a small band of rebels attacked the Liberian town of Butuo, effectively starting what would later on become the *Liberian Civil War*, which would last for nearly fourteen years with intermittent periods of respite. So when August 24, 1990 finally came, there were no students parading in the streets and there was no award presentation ceremony to be held in the Pavilion. Why? The Civil War had reached Monrovia and the only persons who could dare move on the streets were gun-toting rebels and government soldiers who were locked in a fierce and deadly battle for control of the city.

Liberia's Encounter with Crises- the Civil War and the Ebola Epidemic

Many of you are quite aware of the horrendous nature of the Liberian Civil War and the huge toll it exacted on Liberia, not the least of which was the loss of more than 200,000 lives. I therefore would spare you the details because Liberia and Liberians have moved on after the war officially ended in 2003 with the signing of the Peace Accord, which ushered in a two-year transitional government paving the way for the holding of free, fair, democratic elections in which Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as Africa's first female President. In August 2013, we celebrated ten consecutive years of peace, for which we remain eternally grateful to all our friends around the world, especially sisterly West African countries who contributed troops to peacekeeping missions in Liberia. Not surprisingly, all the four other countries of WAEC contributed troops to help quell the tension in Liberia.

Though still saddled with many of the teething challenges of a post-conflict fragile state, Liberia was making tremendous progress in putting itself back on the path of recovery and development. Unfortunately by this time last year, another enemy attacked. This time around it was not gun-toting rebels trying to gain a foothold on Liberian territory. Instead it was a more

insidious enemy – the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), which had crossed into the Liberian city of Foya on the border with Guinea. Since that time, Liberia has again been mired in a serious health crisis which has occasioned the death of more than 4,000 persons. As we observe the first anniversary of the start of the Ebola crisis, I am pleased to note that the dark cloud that hovered over my country is fast giving way to a new sunshine of hope. We now have only one confirmed case in the entire country after registering no new cases for more than three straight weeks. But whatever progress we have made cannot be celebrated as hugely as we would want because Sierra Leone and Guinea, the two other Mano River Union (MRU) countries entangled in the Ebola crisis, are still registering new cases; hence the need to step up regional initiatives in ridding our entire region of this deadly virus.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, that this 63rd Annual Council Meeting, which should have been held in Liberia in line with WAEC's principle of rotation, is being held in Lagos, Nigeria is one of the consequences of the Ebola crisis. On behalf of the government and people of Liberia, I therefore thank the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

forfilling in the gap and hosting this event in the bustling city of Lagos. Liberians will also never forget the hands of solidarity and empathy that have been extended to us by our fellow West African countries and all other countries and institutions since the Ebola outbreak in Liberia.

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen,

The Liberian Civil started in December 1989, barely two weeks after my graduation from high school. By July 1990 the Civil War had reached Monrovia causing the disruption of classes at the University of Liberia where I had begun my undergraduate studies. My mother, father, and our entire family along with many other families had to flee to the hinterland for safety. The journey to safety was done mainly on foot and we had to traverse many dangerous checkpoints manned by red-eyed, trigger happy fighters that would kill on the whim. Going through a checkpoint was akin to going through a literal valley of the shadow of death, as gunmen would often times eject people from the lines and kill them because of their tribal, religious or political connections. I remember the trauma and utter

shock that overwhelmed us when an individual was mercilessly flogged and nearly killed because the fighters alleged that he was one of those spreading the deadly disease HIV/AIDS in Liberia because they had found some condoms in his bag. "There is nothing more frightful than ignorance in action," says German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe.

The ghastly display of human's bestiality and sheer wickedness caused me much psychological pain, but nothing troubled me more than the fact that at some of those checkpoints were some of my former schoolmates and classmates, a few of whom had taken the WAEC exam with me barely a year ago. Some of them had gotten fully incorporated into the ranks of the warring factions and also fully incorporated into the perpetration of atrocious crimes. Some of them had suddenly transformed or had been transformed into killing machines. I was troubled internally as I tried to reconcile these two contrasting sights and experiences of the people I thought I knew very well. Then some deep questions started racing through my mind. Firstly, why the war in the first place? Secondly, what explains the ease with which an academically excellent person can transition from good behavior in a classroom to horrible behavior in a civil

conflict? What challenges bedevil African societies today and are we giving our youth the right preparation to meet those challenges? As we emphasize excellence on the WAEC exams, are we unwittingly de-emphasizing some qualities that are critical to the success of the youth in the real world? What values are we passing on to our youths to make them better leaders of Africa in the future?

John Locke and *Tabula Rasa*, the Blank Slate

In his "*Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)*", the English philosopher, John Locke, posits that the mind of a new born child is a *tabula rasa*, an un-scribed tablet, a blank slate on which the child's environment or society later writes. In essence the child begins as a morally neutral being, not inherently bad or inherently evil. Locke believes that the ideal education is one which instills a strong moral sense in the young person and that a child should be taught virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning. The notion of *tabula rasa* espoused by Locke and others puts them firmly on the side of "nurture" in the "nature versus nurture"

debate. According to *Wikipedia*, "Nature and Nurture relates to the relative importance of an individual's innate qualities ("nature" in the sense of *nativism* or *innatism*) as compared to an individual's personal experiences ("nurture" in the sense of *empiricism* or *behaviourism*) in causing individual differences in physical and behavior traits. ... One may also refer to the concepts of *innatism* and empiricism as *genetic determinism* and *environmentalism* respectively."

However, in recent years many philosophers and psychologists have taken a middle ground, proffering the notion that a child's development is not explained wholly by either nature or nurture but that both of these factors interact in relative proportions to determine what a child or a young person finally becomes. I too am a middle-of-the-roader in this nature versus nurture debate, as I believe that some people are borne with certain natural capabilities, traits, inclinations, etc, which they inherit from their parents; however, through years of conditioning in a particular environment, those innate qualities are either honed or deadened. I also believe that depending on the level and intensity of exposure or conditioning in an external environment, a young person can learn certain

things that their heredity may not suggest or can unlearn certain things that their heredity may suggest.

In short, while I argue that the child's slate may not be entirely blank as suggested by Locke and others, whatever inscription that might have been written on the slate by nature covers only a small portion of the entire slate. A bigger chunk of the slate is blank. As the child grows older, his or her slate will be beckoning for scripts, positive or negative, good or evil. WAEC exams are administered mainly to high school and junior high school seniors who are usually in their early or late teens, periods when they are still impressionable and malleable. At this stage, there are numerous individuals and experiences writing on a young person's slate. Parents, siblings, peers, religious leaders, teachers all impact the life of students in varying degrees, but I may say without hesitation that the impact of the teacher is overly significant in these formative years. I use the term "teacher" as a catch-all word to represent the entire learning environment which includes those who transfer knowledge in the classrooms, school administrators, support staff as well as the testing and

evaluation regime, which for English Speaking West African countries, is the WAEC exam.

What are the ideal outcomes we seek on the WAEC exams? Obviously, an outcome where every candidate sitting the exams would master the various subjects so well that they would earn an "A" and fall in the "Division One" category. We call these top performers in public exams "excellent students". But again I ask, is academic excellence in and of itself sufficient in getting the youth of today prepared for the multifarious challenges of today and the future? It is often said that the young people are the future leaders, but are we preparing them so that they can be good future leaders of our countries, our region, our continent, and our one world?

The Theme: "What Else Are We Writing on the Slate? A Call for a Holistic Preparation of the Youth."

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is in this connection that I humbly request that you indulge me for the next few minutes as I expand on the theme, ***"What Else Are We Writing on the Slate? A Call for a***

Holistic Preparation of the Youth.” The mandate of WAEC is “*to be Africa’s foremost examining body, developing and maintaining internationally accepted procedures in examinations, providing qualitative and reliable educational assessment, encouraging academic and **moral excellence among the youth**, and promoting sustainable human resource development, mutual understanding and international cooperation.*” Generally, WAEC has done a great job in fulfilling its mission, especially with regard to “encouraging academic excellence among the youth.” But I am not too sure whether we can speak in similarly confident language with regard to WAEC’s performance in encouraging “moral excellence”, except to say that the fulfillment of other aspects of WAEC’s mandate contributes tangentially to the achievement of moral excellence.

But this begs the question, “What is “moral excellence”? I know that philosophers and other intellectuals have long argued over the precise definition of “moral excellence” or what is “right” and what is “wrong.” The *Free Dictionary* for its part defines “*moral excellence*” as *the quality of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.* Some synonyms that have been proffered for moral excellence include “*virtue*”, “*virtuousness*”,

"good", and "goodness." The various religions and faiths delve very deeply into these issues, causing some individuals to think that only persons with deep religious beliefs care or should care about moral excellence. While there may be arguments as to what exactly moral excellence is, there is little disagreement over what it is not. Examination fraud is not moral excellence; corruption in the private and public sectors is not moral excellence; the cold-blooded beheading perpetrated by the young fighter in the Liberian or Sierra Leonean Civil War or by the notorious *Jihadi John* of *ISIS* is not moral excellence; the kidnapping of over 200 innocent girls in Chibok, Nigeria is not moral excellence; the stashing of billions of dollars of a country's resources in dubious Swiss bank accounts by African bigwigs is not moral excellence. And certainly, doing unto others what we would not want them to do unto us is not moral excellence.

Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) from Africa

In January of this year, the High Level Panel set up by the UN Economic Commission of Africa (UNECA) to investigate and report on the sensitive issue of *Illicit Financial Flows* from Africa issued its final report titled, "*Illicit Financial Flows: Track It! Stop It! Get It!*" The High Level Panel was headed by former South African President Thabo Mbeki. The Panel's report makes

for very interesting reading and is a must-read for everyone interested in the development of our continent. The Report defines *Illicit Financial Flows (IFF)* as "money illegally earned, transferred or used." Excerpts of the Report read thus: "*Over the last 50 years, Africa is estimated to have **lost in excess of \$1trillion in illicit financial flows (IFFs)**. This sum is roughly equivalent to all of the official development assistance received by Africa during the same timeframe. **Currently, Africa is estimated to be losing more than \$50 billion annually in IFFs**. But these estimates may well fall short of reality because accurate data do not exist for all African countries, and these estimates often exclude some forms of IFFs that by nature are secret and cannot be properly estimated, such as proceeds of bribery and trafficking of drugs, people and firearms. The amount lost annually by Africa through IFFs is therefore likely to exceed \$50 billion by a significant amount*

These outflows are of serious concern, given inadequate growth, high levels of poverty, resource needs and the changing global landscape of official development assistance. Poverty remains of serious concern in Africa in absolute and relative terms. The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day in Africa is estimated to have increased from 290 million

in 1990 to 414 million in 2010 (United Nations 2013). This is because population growth outweighs the number of people rising out of poverty. Moreover, GDP per African was around \$2,000 in 2013, which is around one-fifth of the level worldwide (IMF, 2014). Poverty in Africa is also multidimensional, in the sense of limited access to education, healthcare, housing, potable water and sanitation. This situation puts the loss of more than \$50 billion a year in IFFs in better perspective.”

The Panel found that that IFFs take place through 1) commercial activities such as abusive transfer pricing, trade mispricing, evading or aggressively avoiding tax, and dodging custom duties and domestic levies; 2) criminal activities including money laundering; and 3) corruption and abuse of entrusted authorities. The Report identifies the following as drivers and enablers of illicit financial flows: poor governance, weak regulatory structures, double taxation agreements, tax incentives, and the existence of financial secrecy jurisdictions and/or tax havens.

These figures are indeed alarming and mind-boggling, for at a time when more than 400 million Africans are living in absolute poverty, it is indeed

scandalous that the self-same continent will be losing more than \$50 billion dollars annually in IFF. Every illicit outflow from Africa is, or to be more precise, should be an illicit inflow for some other continent and some other country. Therefore, it goes without saying that others have profited immensely from the poverty of Africa. However, it is often said that it takes two to tango. Who are the individuals on our continent operating hands in gloves with vampires from other continents to suck the life-blood of our beloved continent? The very sons and daughters of Africa – most of them are leaders in business or in government. Many of them are academically and intellectually excellent and it should surprise none of us if some of them might have earned “certificates of academic excellence” before. No doubt, this only implies that the script of moral excellence might not have been written on their slates during their impressionable years or might have been written so faintly that it evaporates very quickly in the face of temptation.

Lest I be misunderstood, more holistic preparation of the youth is not the exclusive obligation of WAEC or the school system in general. All players including the family, the peer group, the government, and faith-based

institutions must play their part. What happened in the Indian city of Bihar just last week where parents aided their children in perpetrating examination malpractice only buttress the point that ensuring moral excellence is not the sole responsibility of teachers or public examination bodies. The Bihar exam fraud was so widespread and brazen that it earned a space in the BBC World Service news bulletin. Excerpts of the BBC news story as culled from the BBC news website read thus:

"Many students smuggled in textbooks and notes into the examination centres despite tight security - and parents and friends were photographed scaling the walls of test centres to pass on answers to students during the current secondary school examinations. The examinations, held by the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB), began on Tuesday and are scheduled to go on until 24 March. Officials say more than 1.4 million students are taking the tests. Local newspapers have been full of photos of parents and relatives trying to help their children cheat even at considerable risk to their own lives...Some photos even show policemen posted outside the centres accepting bribes to look the other way, our correspondent adds. During a raid at just one school on Wednesday, the authorities seized sheets containing answers which filled up nine sacks. "What can the

government do to stop cheating if parents and relatives are not ready to cooperate? Should the government give orders to shoot them?" the Times of India quoted Bihar Education Minister PK Shahi as saying." In no circumstance should a parent knowingly give his or her child money to bribe an instructor or shamelessly aid and abet the child to cheat as was the case in the Indian City of Bihar; if a parent proceeds on such a wrong path, he or she will only be succeeding in writing big and thick negative scripts on the child's slate.

What Can WAEC and School Authorities Do?

As the premier public examinations body in our region, WAEC working closely with school authorities can contribute to a more holistic preparation of the youth by taking a host of positive measures, a few of which I want to stress:

1. First and foremost, protect the integrity of the entire testing system. During the height of the Ebola crisis in Liberia, one of the nation's reputable health facilities was closed down for months because Ebola had killed the Hospital Administrator and many other doctors and nurses including a former schoolmate of mine. The first among the hospital's staff to have gotten ill was the Administrator, who presumably

acquired the disease after coming in contact with a female patient. When the Administrator started showing signs of illness, his hospital colleagues decided to conduct a laboratory test to ascertain whether or not he was infected with Ebola. Before the results were released, the other health workers strictly observed the health protocol and avoided coming into physical contact with the ill Administrator. However, all of them relaxed their guide when the results came back and proved negative for Ebola. They therefore decided to give their sick boss all the care that he deserved, not excluding making physical contact with him. But in spite of all what they did, the Administrator's illness worsened, necessitating the administering of another Ebola test. The test was reportedly conducted by a more experienced lab technician under strict controls. Sadly, the results this time around showed that the Administrator had been infected with Ebola. Panic overtook the hospital staff. In a couple of days, the Administrator passed away soon to be followed by about eight other health workers who had contracted Ebola from the Administrator. *The other health workers who died had relied on the results of a faulty test and relaxed their guide!*

The hospital incident only highlights the fact that the consequences of faulty or compromised examinations or evaluations could be tragic. The test result issued by WAEC is analogous to the test results released by a lab technician in a medical facility. If the patient indeed has Ebola, let the result show it. If the patient has malaria, let the result show it. If the patient has HIV, let the result show it. Just as it is conscienceless to tell a patient that he has a common cold when in fact he has Ebola, it is equally conscienceless to issue an examination result that gives an "A" to a person whose actual performance would warrant an "F". In short, exam results should mirror actual performance.

In order to stem malpractice in the system, we must identify all of its causal and catalyzing factors. At the very core of the problem is lack of integrity. Unfortunately, in spite of all the laudable efforts that WAEC, school authorities, and governments have applied over the years to curtail examination fraud, there still exist a few individuals in the system who stand for nothing and can fall for anything. Some administrators, teachers or students who engage in malpractice before, during and after the sitting of the actual test do so in their mad quest for "unmerited merits" – being

recognized as the principal or teacher of the school whose candidates excel on the WAEC is a public relation achievement that that some individuals cannot resist. Some students dread the shame and other consequences of failing the WAEC exam so much so that they are prepared to do anything to avoid such a terrible outcome.

To help close the integrity gap in the system, we need to address a host of challenges that undermine the strength and integrity of the system, not the least of which is the dismal plight of teachers and other education workers. This will require increased and sustained financial support to the education sector from governments, the private sector, donors, and ordinary citizens. Students in their impressionable years do not only learn from what the teacher says in the classroom but also what he actually does in and out of the classroom. Therefore, we should never cause these teachers, examiners, invigilators, test markers and support staff, all positive contributors to the forward march of our countries, to become so desperate for survival that they could easily yield to the slightest temptations. We must change the situation where to pursue a career as an educator is to sign a perpetual contract with poverty.

Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen, at this point, permit me to share with you a poem I wrote in 2001 titled "The African Teacher", which highlights the heroic and selfless contributions of teachers and educators despite their extremely difficult working conditions. The poem aims to prick the consciences of policy makers to take more concrete actions to reverse this sad reality. It reads thus:

THE AFRICAN TEACHER

*I am the bee that produces the honey,
I am the tree that produces the apple, and
I am the goose that lays the golden egg.*

*Wearing worn-out shoes and toting a deflated stomach,
I brave the drenching rain and the scorching sun on my trip
To this rectangular room just to ensure that my nation's future leaders
Understand that one (1) plus one (1) is two (2) and that water boils at
Hundred degrees on the Celsius scale.*

*But in spite of all my stress and strain,
I am always the last to receive my pay
And my pay cannot even transport me home.
When I cry and cry, I cry and cry only to hear my own cry.*

*Yes, I am the neglected, dejected, and disrespected fellow you
See every weekday lecturing in an African classroom –
I am the African Teacher!*

2. Another thing WAEC and school authorities can do to contribute to the holistic preparation of the youth is to promote the value of teamwork in the testing and evaluation system. The WAEC exams

as structured now evaluate the performance of students as individuals and gives practically no consideration or weight to the performance of students in groups. For instance, in a class of forty students, the grade that student A scores is not influenced at all by the grade student C or student D scores. At the end of the day, it is what you do, not what others do, that determines your fate on the WAEC exams. As a result, every student knows that his destiny, by and large, is in his own hands. The positive side of this is that it makes the student to cultivate the attitude of independence and rugged individualism, which are also useful for survival in the real world. However, the unintended consequence of this fixation on individual performance and individual assessment is that the student also develops an attitude of selfishness and, in some cases, arrogance.

On the job or in the real world in general, our performance or destinies are affected by the actions or inactions of others. Many tasks will have to be executed in teams in which there are very smart people and people that

are not too smart. Managers, especially officials of government appointed to new positions usually have little option other than to manage staff already recruited. Essentially, it is a case of dealing with the hands you are dealt and realizing that if you are to succeed, you must accept that your chain is as strong as its weakest link. Thus, one has to have such qualities as patience, empathy, as well as the ability to coach and motivate to be effective. Unfortunately, a person with a solid record of academic excellence may perform woefully on the job just because in contrast to the school environment where detaching oneself from others in order to absorb complex academic materials was critical to success; on the job, working with others, strong or weak, is critical to success.

In order to encourage teamwork skills in the youth that will be useful for their future, WAEC, working with school administrators, can derive a system whereby a student's final score on the WAEC exam is a combination of his/her individual score plus an extra score that takes into consideration group or team performance. Two ways to proceed are as follows:

1. *The student's final score becomes an aggregate of the student's individual score on the exam plus the score of the team of which the student was a member.*
2. *The student's final score is a sum of the student's individual score plus an extra score that is earned if his/her school performs above a certain threshold.* For students from a particular school to get the extra points, WAEC could set a minimum score that must be earned by all students from that school in addition to a minimum average score that must be earned by the school.

Such evaluation schemes that place some premium on teamwork would constrain students to look out for each other, knowing full well that their fates are tied in what Martin Luther King calls a "garment of mutuality".

3. Encourage the cultivation of research and creative skills among the youth. The real world does not lend itself to the neat explanations and graphical depictions that one gets in the classroom. This sobering reality needs to be absorbed by the youth when their slates still have

enough spaces to accommodate scripts. In school practically every exam or test has a key, making young people to assume that there are fixed, neat answers to every question. This brings frustration in later life when they find out that the questions and challenges they face in the real world do not lend themselves to neat answers. In fact, some questions and challenges they will face in the real world may be unique and unprecedented, constraining them to be creative in finding answers or solutions or approximations of the answers or solutions. As American Author Tom Bodettsays, "In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you lesson."

We know that undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate educational institutions place deeper focus on research and honing creative skills; however, it may redound to society's benefit if our young people begin imbibing these skills earlier on in their formative years when their slates are largely empty, a period that fortunately coincides with their encounters with the WAEC exam. Therefore, WAEC and school authorities have to define appropriate evaluation and assessment mechanisms that incentivize or give due credit to research and creative skills among the youth.

Public exams schemes such as the WAEC exams try to evaluate students as objectively as possible in order to avoid a perception of bias; hence, there will always be a tendency to develop questions whose answers are straight forward enough such that a test marker would face little headache in his task. As difficult as it may seem, WAEC and school authorities need to develop evaluation schemes that seek the right balance between the need for objective, transparent, and standardized grading on the hand and the need for incentivizing innovation and creativity in students on the other.

4.Incorporate in the curriculum and the testing system subjects related to the cultivation of the culture of peace and tolerance as well as effective, selfless and ethical leadership. The West African region or the African continent as a whole has suffered from the deleterious impact of violent conflicts. The extremely bloody civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the present upheavals in northern Nigeria are just a few of the many conflicts that have bedeviled our region and undermined our development. Many factors may precipitate conflicts, a

few of which include bad governance that lead to marginalization and exclusion of a group of people from the political and economic life of their country; religious and ethnic bigotry, and outright greed. But no matter the cause or causes of conflicts, the late American President John F. Kennedy was right when he said, "Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind."

The young people of today, who are the leaders of tomorrow, must therefore begin to learn effective leadership skills and must be drenched sufficiently in the culture of peace and tolerance. We must also ensure that the growing wave of extremism and fundamentalism and all its manifestations do not continue to dog our continent and our one world. Embedding in the curriculum and the evaluation system subjects that make the youth to have a better appreciation for peace and tolerance and ethical leadership will help immensely in the prevention of violent conflicts and the production of leaders who will put the interest of their people and country ahead of personal interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me concede that the points I have so far emphasized do not comprise an exhaustive list of things that must be done in order to produce youths who can contribute positively to dealing with the challenges we face today or may face in the future. Qualities such as self-discipline, self-esteem, humility, the ability to cope and bounce back from failure or setbacks are among a long list of qualities that must be written on the slate of a holistically prepared youth. The role of WAEC and other actors in the educational system is critical to the achievement of this end. Governments, religious leaders, the peer group, the family, and society at large all need to play their respective parts very well so that we can achieve our goal of producing youth that are excellent not only academically but excellent in a more holistic way.

Finally before I recede to my seat, I want to warmly congratulate Dr. EvelyneS. Kandakai and Mrs. HawaGoll-Kotchie who will be ascending to the positions of Chair and Vice Chair of the West African Examinations Council at this 63rd Annual Meeting of the Council. Dr. Kandakai's assumption of the position of Chair of the Council is historic in that this is the first time in the 63-year history of WAEC that a female has been elected to chair the Council. Therefore, on behalf of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female president, and the government and people of Liberia, I salute you Dr. Kandakai and Hon. Goll-Kotchie for bringing honor and pride to our dear motherland, Liberia. I wish you God's choicest blessings as you embark on your onerous duties.

Thank You Very Much.