

**THE STUDENTS LOAN POLICY IS BASED ON A LIE WHICH IS THAT NIGERIA IS TOO POOR TO FUND PUBLIC EDUCATION BUT THIS IS NOT TRUE. NIGERIA HAS ENOUGH RESOURCES TO FUND PUBLIC EDUCATION IF THESE RESOURCES ARE DEMOCRATICALLY-PLANNED AND MANAGED INSTEAD OF BEING STOLEN BY THE CORRUPT CAPITALIST ELITE**

**Written and produced by the Education Rights Campaign (ERC) – A platform formed by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) to defend students and workers rights in the education sector (December, 2023)**

## INTRODUCTION

Since he came to power on 29 May 2023, President Bola Tinubu has left no one in doubt that he has come to achieve what a series of anti-poor capitalist regimes before him could not achieve: the complete abandonment of government's responsibility towards funding of public education and its full commercialization. This agenda is what is behind the current epidemic of fee hikes across campuses and the government decision to introduce the “Students loans (Access to Higher Education) Act, 2023 also known as the student loan scheme – a policy that is meant to alter the landscape of the education sector starting from January 2024.

The Students Loans Act 2023 was signed into law by President Tinubu on Monday 12 June 2023. The Act has the following aim and objective: “To provide easy access to higher education for indigent Nigerians through Interest free loans from the Nigerian Education Loan Fund established in this Act with a view to providing education for all Nigerians; and for related matters”. Due to opposition from groups, unions and members of the public, the government decided to amend the Act but even while the new amendments are yet to be publicized, President Tinubu has announced that the policy will be implemented starting from January 2024. The fact that a month before a new law is going to be implemented its exact wording is unknown is another illustration of the limits of formal democracy in today's Nigeria. Nevertheless, we have no reason to expect any fundamental change in the amended version of the policy. Like we have always explained, no amount of amendment of the Students Loan Act can make it an acceptable solution to the challenges facing the education sector.

The government claims that Students loan will serve as a solution to the challenges facing public education. Unfortunately, those who should know better have been helping the government to promote this lie. In fact, the immediate-past leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), which is supposed to be the voice of Nigerian students, at a meeting with the President on Tuesday 13 June 2023, poured encomium on President Tinubu for signing the bill. It would appear from all these that the new legislation can solve the age-long problem of lack of access to education that has plagued Nigeria from times immemorial. On the contrary, we in the Education Rights Campaign (ERC) think it will not. Rather we believe those who have applauded the Act did so either out of ignorance or they are anti-poor and pro-capitalist careerist elements who do not believe that education ought to be an inalienable right and not a privilege.

## 10 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD REJECT AND RESIST PRESIDENT TINUBU'S STUDENTS LOAN POLICY

If you are a Nigerian student or education worker or a parent, please don't allow yourself to be fooled by their lies. Almost all the people in this government from President Tinubu himself, benefited from subsidized and in some cases free education while they were growing up. Now they are saying our generation can only go to school through credit. This is a lie. Here are the 10 reasons why we believe President Tinubu's student loan policy is a scam:

### (1) IT IS A GIMMICK BY GOVERNMENT TO EVADE ITS RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS FUNDING OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution recognizes education as a social responsibility even though it was fundamentally written by the military. According to section 18 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels". Subsection 3 © of the same provision directs government to provide "free University education" although it adds "as at when practicable". Although no Nigerian government has ever fully implemented this section of the constitution yet they have always been obliged to pay lip-service to their commitment to public education by making annual budgetary education even if inadequate.

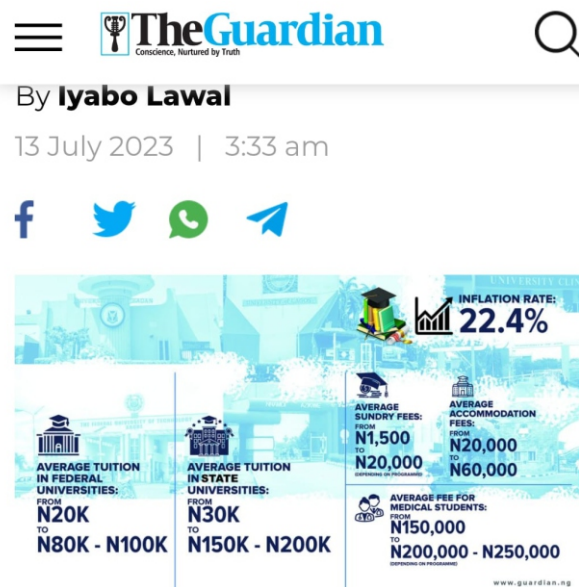
The novelty of the Students Loan Act is that it provides an alibi for the government to completely evade its responsibility towards funding public education. So at a period when budgetary allocation to education has declined drastically and there is an urgent need for an improvement, the Federal government is being mandated by the Students loan Act to divert every 1% of Nigeria's Custom Service (NCS) revenue, every 1% of Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) revenue, every 1% of Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) revenue and every 1% of oil profits to

create an Education Loans Fund. This means that the funding to public education is likely to plummet further in the coming period.

### (2) IT IS A SMOKE SCREEN TO TAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION OUT OF THE REACH OF THE POOR

The Students Loans scheme is the work of con-artists whose aim is to hoodwink the mass of Nigerian people, including students, youth, parents and workers into thinking that it expands access to higher education whereas what it does is to shut the door more firmly against the majority of Nigerians seeking higher education. Indeed it is a smoke screen to take higher education out of the reach of the poor. Already fees on campuses are increasing at an alarming rate. Instead of countering the fee increment by increasing budgetary allocation to education, the government is offering the students loan as a solution.

Even some newly elected NANS leaders have praised the students' loan policy as an answer to the rising cost of education. But what they don't



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understand is the student loan means is a changed situation in the education sector. It means that in the coming period, government is no more under any obligation whatsoever to address the high cost of education by increasing funding to education. It also means that school administrators can increase their fees to as high as they want since a loan scheme exists. In fact with the Students Loan, fee hike will become more frequent. This is the experience from the US and UK where students loan exist. There, cost of College or University education have gone up so much in the past few decades. So in future if you are complaining about hike in fees, all government will tell you is: go and obtain a loan. But the students' loan programme is not going to cater for every indigent student and here is where the fraudulent character of this scheme fully reveals itself. Furthermore, the Students Loans policy is a market fundamentalist and anti-poor piece of legislation aimed at full commercialization of public education while legitimizing the Tinubu government's shameful abdication of its role in funding public education. If truly the Tinubu government wants to help poor and indigent students who are in millions, then it would recover trillions of naira being stolen legally and illegally from public coffers by big businesses and politicians in order to ensure that there is adequate government funding for public education.

### **(3) IT WILL TRANSFORM PUBLIC EDUCATION INTO A BUSINESS AND STUDENTS INTO CUSTOMERS**

Those who have welcomed the students' loan policy claim it would help to resolve the problem of fee hike which is forcing thousands of students to drop out. This is sheer bunkum. In fact, there is an inexorable link between the Students loan policy and the wave of fee hike across campuses. Both are each side of the same coin. The truth is that the Tinubu administration has a sinister agenda to transform public education into a business where students are customers. The students' loan policy is the most important piece in this process of transformation. The aim is to make public education into a self-sufficient sector able to fund itself by generating revenue through cost-reflective fees and other sources instead of government funding.

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The policy of automatic 40 percent deduction from the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of Universities, which President Tinubu hastily cancelled in November, because of opposition, is a clear indication of this. According to Tinubu, the policy was cancelled because “this is not the best time for such policies since our Universities are struggling”. What this means is that the policy can be introduced again once the Universities became solvent after generating sufficient IGR through fees. This is the goal. In fact, once the students loan policy becomes operational, government funding of education is likely to decline drastically as the only role government wants to play is to capitalize the Education bank from which students are to obtain loans to support their educational aspirations. Therefore, the operationalization of the students' loan policy is tantamount to legalization of underfunding of public education by the government. This will turn tertiary education into a commodity on a willing buyer, willing seller principle with the result that only those who can afford it will aspire to further their education.

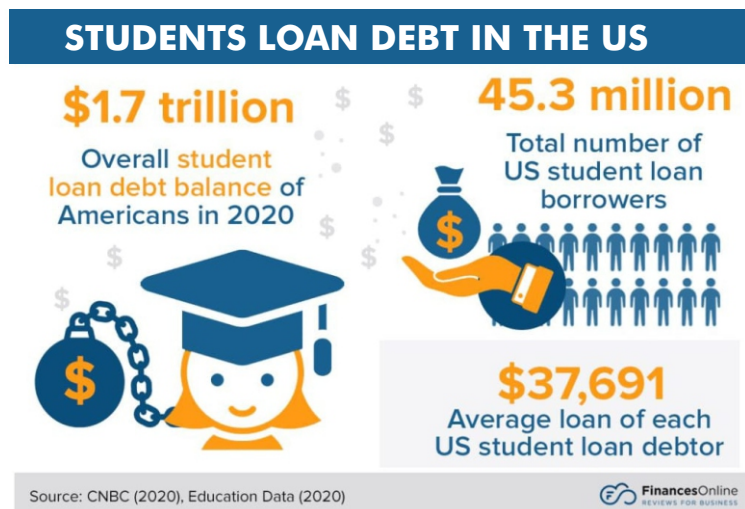
### **(4) IT HAS NOT WORKED ANYWHERE ELSE**

Government and its supporters have been going about town saying the Students Loan is the best policy ever especially as it has worked elsewhere. First and foremost, this is not the first time Nigeria's thieving ruling class have proposed a students' loan in order to evade their responsibility towards the funding of public education. In the 1970s, the federal military government promulgated the Nigerian Students' Loans Board decree to provide funding to Nigerian students based on loans repayable in 20 years after graduation but this soon collapsed after a while due to massive indebtedness and corruption.

In addition, practical examples from across the world show that students' debt schemes do not work, instead, they subject people to lifelong indebtedness. In the USA, which is popular for such schemes, a three-year student loan repayment freeze since early 2020 just came to an end in September 2023. The freeze was introduced because a lot of people



could not afford to get gainfully employed or pay their debts. Indeed, for the same reason, Biden government announced in 2022 a student loan forgiveness which was overruled by the court. In Britain, graduating students legally face 40 years of debt repayments. If this is what happens in some of the world's richest countries what is the future in Nigeria?

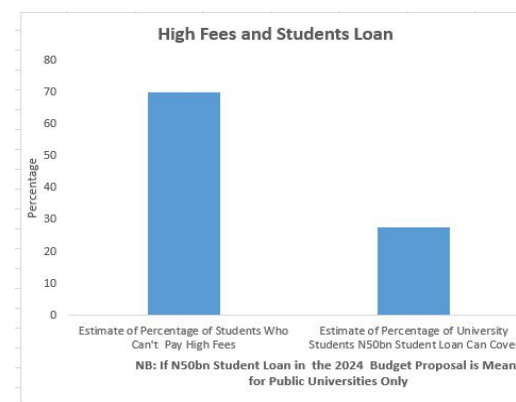


## (5) IT WILL ONLY CATER FOR A MINORITY OF THE STUDENTS POPULATION

According to the provisions of the 2024 budget proposal, the sum of N50 billion has been earmarked for the Students loan. The question we should ask is how many students loan can this sum accommodate? According to Statista, there are a total of 1.2 million undergraduate students in 91 public Universities in Nigeria. We do not have data for public polytechnics and colleges of education but let's project that these two levels of the tertiary education sector have one million apiece, that would mean that the total number of Nigerian students in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria is not more than 3.2 million.

Given the reality of the economy, the rising fees and the cost of living crisis today, a huge proportion of Nigerian students will fall into the category of those who would need support for their education. In fact,

those who are rich no more bother to send their children to public tertiary institutions because of incessant strikes. They would rather send their children to private schools or abroad. This means that a majority of students in public tertiary institutions are from lower middle class, working class and poor homes who would need support for their education. With the rising inflation and other worsening economic indices, there is hardly any middle class left in Nigeria again. Everybody, except the rich, is struggling to survive. In this sense, we can safely assume that nothing less than 70 percent, that is 2.24 million, of the total current students' population would need help to pay their fees and cover other rising cost of education. At the average tuition fee rate of 150, 000, the Federal government needs at least a sum of N336 billion for an adequate students' loan. But even if we base our calculation on the University undergraduates alone whose population, according by Statista, is nothing less than 1.2 million, the total sum of N50 billion is still a drop in the ocean. 70 percent of the total University students population is 840,000. At the average school fees rate of N150,000, a total sum of N126 billion will be needed for any students loan scheme that would meet their needs. So, the N50 billion in the 2024 budget proposal would only be able to cover a students' loan for 10.4 percent of the entire population of students in all public tertiary institutions and 27.7 percent of students if it is meant for public Universities alone.



So what happens to the mass majority of students who are unable to get

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the loan? Already, in anticipation of the January 2024 deadline for implementation of the students' loan policy, administrators of public tertiary institutions have been hiking fees. In fact, instead of the students' loan policy providing solution to the high cost of education, it has become an enabler of more and more increment as school administrators struggle to raise their payable fees as high as possible with the hope of getting as much as they can from the students loan funds. Unfortunately, in a situation where the students' loan will only cater for a few, what this inexorably means is that those unable to obtain a loan will have to shoulder a huge burden of fee if they wish to receive an education.

There are however additional factors that will limit the coverage of the students' loan. This includes the onerous conditionalities of the Act which states for example that “applicant income or family income must be less than N500, 000 per annum as well as the provision that says “applicants must provide at least two guarantors, and each of the guarantors shall be (i) civil servants of at least level 12 in service (ii) lawyer with at least 10 years post-call experience (iii) judicial officer, or (iv) justice of peace”. But even if the government amends these provisions in order to expand the coverage of the loan a bit, this will still not be enough. The reality is that given the cost of living crisis and the proportion of the population living in multi-dimensional poverty, it is obvious that several hundreds of thousands of undergraduate students, far more than the students loan policy aim to cater for, will need some form of support or the other if they ever will be able to further their tertiary education. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 133 million Nigerians are living in multidimensional poverty.

Unfortunately, there is even no guarantee that even if an applicant succeeds at satisfying all these onerous requirements, they would get the loan. Section 16, subsection 4 of the Act clearly states that “disbursement will only be on availability of funds”. This means many indigent students

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may have to wait endlessly for months and years with the likely consequence that they lose their admission or are forced to drop out. It is for all these reasons that we conclude that it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a poor and indigent Nigerian to benefit from President Tinubu's students loan programme.

#### **(6) IT WILL NOT RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF ACCESS EVEN FOR THE MINORITY OF STUDENTS THAT ARE ABLE TO OBTAIN IT**

By virtue of the Students Loan Act, an indigent student is encouraged to obtain a loan from the Education Bank to pay tuition fees. According to section 13 of the Act, the aims and objectives of the Fund shall be to “facilitate the mobilization of funds to provide interest free loans to students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria for the payment of TUITION FEES”. Tuition fee can be defined as the charge or fee for instruction or teaching. Basically, it covers costs like salaries of lecturers and stationeries. There are two broad types of fees payable in universities across the world namely, tuition fee and sundry fees. Sundry fees include admission fees, acceptance charges, library fees, ICT fees, development levy, accommodation fees, matriculation fees, convocation fees etc. Nigeria currently runs a tuition-free public University system owing to the historical struggles of Nigerian students and workers over the decades. Despite this, sundry fees have increased exponentially in the last few years to an average of N150, 000 per school for an academic session.

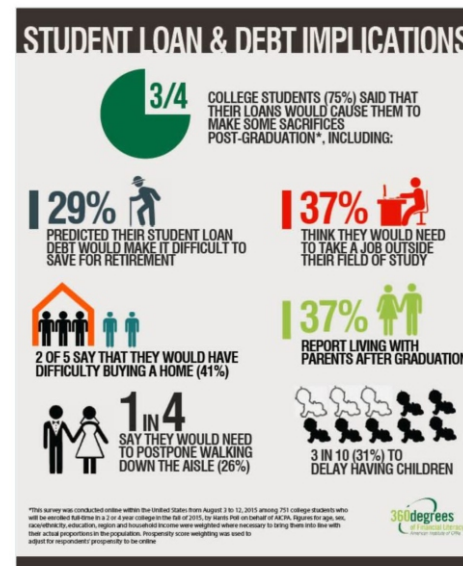
Now since the prospective loan beneficiaries are indigent, how will they pay the sundry fees which in many higher institutions run into tens of thousands of Naira? If an indigent student pays tuition fee through loan but has no money to pay for acceptance fee or library fee or development levy, will they be admitted? Will they be able to attend lectures, sit for test, examinations and graduate? In that sense, how are beneficiaries' access to higher education enhanced by this loan which may only take care of not more than 25 percent of the total cost of education while leaving them to scrounge for the rest?

Meanwhile, statistics show that at least 40 percent of students are forced to stay at off-campus residences in public institutions that are residential while there are now several new-generation public universities, polytechnics and colleges of education that do not even have any hostel policy. This means that the bulk of their students always have to struggle to raise hundreds of thousands of naira to pay for accommodation off-campus after paying their school fees. In fact, in some cases, the cost of off-campus accommodation can be equal to or greater than even the school fees in some of these institutions. So, what exactly does this Act resolve for indigent students if they obtain a loan to pay tuition but still have to struggle to raise money to pay sundry charges which may be twice the amount of loan they have obtained and for which they would be indebted for life? This is aside feeding cost and the generally high cost of living on campus which students still have to bear. This for us is why we think this Students Loan Act is a fraudulent piece of legislation which claims to open access to higher education for indigent students but does nothing of the sort.

## (7) IT WILL SUBJECT BENEFICIARIES TO LIFELONG INDEBTEDNESS

While the government has been going about saying it is a non-interest loan, the repayment plan is onerous and meant to subject beneficiaries to a miserable existence. Section 18 (1) of the Act says that “Any beneficiary of the loan to which this Act refers shall commence repayment two years after completion of the National Youth Service Corps programme”. This means that it does not matter whether or not the beneficiaries have succeeded in getting a job or not, they must start paying. This is in a country where the unemployment rate is at least 40% for the general population and at least 53.6% among young people! It is a fact that a majority of graduates seldom get any job at all within the first 2 years after they leave school. In fact, many can still be unemployed 5 years after National Youth Service. So how does the government expect unemployed beneficiaries to begin repayment? Meanwhile, according to

the Act, if beneficiaries default on the loan, subsection (6) says they shall be “liable on conviction to a fine of N500, 000 or imprisonment for a term of two years or both”. This could easily become another source of oppression and extortion by the police and security services.



Meanwhile, subsections (2) and (4) respectively states that “repayment shall be by direct deduction of 10% of the beneficiaries salary at source” and “where the beneficiary is self-employed, he shall remit 10% of his total monthly profit to the Fund”. There is no indication in any of these provisions what should be the level of income earned before a beneficiary should start repayment. It is a known fact that even where graduates get a job, it could be low paid casualised labour. Graduates form the bulk of casual workers in banks, hospitality, entertainment, logistics, app-based transport and the teaching profession today where they work for less than the minimum wage. To ask these low-paid workers to begin to pay 10% of their monthly income for a students' loan is akin to drawing blood from a hemorrhaging patient. It means such a beneficiary will be unable to settle down and start a family just because they obtained a loan. This is why we think this students' loan is likely to plunge its beneficiaries into



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depression, misery and suicide as they have to constantly struggle to pay the loan either while being unemployed or while earning low pay. This is not the kind of bleak future Nigeria's youth deserve!

### **(8) IT WILL LEAD TO MASS DROP OUT AND DECLINE IN ENROLMENT**

Due to its limited coverage and the rising cost of education, the students' loan will precipitate an unprecedented mass drop out of undergraduate students. Only two categories of students will remain on our campuses: those who have rich parents earning high income and those lucky to obtain a loan. The rest will find themselves out of the University system soon enough while thousands of others who want gain admission may be unable to proceed with their education if they are unlucky to get a loan. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has estimated that at least 50 percent of the present undergraduate population in our public Universities will face the prospect of dropping out in the next three years. The Nigerian education landscape will resemble what exist for Nigerian students seeking scholarship for admission into foreign Universities: your chances at getting admitted is dependent on availability of scholarship. If you don't get the scholarship, you won't get admitted or put in other way, even if you get admitted, you can proceed because you can't afford the prohibitive fees. That is the direction Nigeria's education system is travelling. It would be an education system that would be so expensive that only students from rich background or those who are lucky to get the loan will be able to aspire to further their education.

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If nothing is done about these heavy fees being introduced by schools all over the country, in the next two or three years, more than 40%-50% of these children who are in school today will drop out.

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**Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke,**

President Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)  
in the Guardian Newspaper, 25 September, 2023

### **(9) IT WILL LEAD TO JOB LOSS FOR EDUCATION WORKERS**

The effect of this policy will not stop at students; the jobs of academic and non-academic staff are also likely to be affected. We know for certain that some lecturers and non-academic staff are of the illusion that if school fees are raised high enough to make our schools solvent, then better wages and conditions can be guaranteed for them. We are sorry to break it to you that such fantasy will meet shocking disappointment in the following months and years as the students loan policy and its corollary of underfunding do their job of decimating public education.

In 2014, following a three year hike in the payable fees at Lagos State University (LASU) from N25, 000 to about N350, 000, the jobs of education workers came under a severe threat. This was because as students' enrolment declined, the proportion of students and academic staff began to close at a rapid rate. In some departments in LASU, it got to a stage that the number of lecturers was nearly more than the number of available undergraduate students at 100 or 200 level. This led to the threat of downsizing- something which made the Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU) - LASU chapter, to come out openly to oppose the fee hike and demand a reversal. This was because from experience the lecturers immediately understood that fee hike is actually a threat to their jobs. Therefore, unless education workers under the aegis of their unions (ASUU, SSANU, NASU, NAAT, ASUP, COEASU, etc.) are prepared to join Nigerian students to reject and resist the students' loan policy and the wave of fee hike, then very soon, their members' jobs will come under threat as the students population is decimated across Nigerian campuses.

### **(10) IT IS BASED ON FALSE ASSUMPTIONS THAT NIGERIA IS TOO POOR TO FUND PUBLIC EDUCATION**

The main argument of the government to justify the Students loan policy is that Nigeria is too poor to fund public education. In the First Republic, Nigeria with a far less robust economy based on agriculture was able to lay the foundation of public education especially in the Old Western

region through the policy of free education. It was during this period that the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife, as well as gigantic infrastructural projects like the Cocoa House Ibadan, Liberty Stadium (the very first in Africa at the time), Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) were established. Although they ran a capitalist economy riddled with contradictions, yet Awolowo and the Action Group (AG) were able to show with their modest success what was possible even on the basis capitalism. But that was in a period when the international capitalist economy was steadily growing, the situation is different now with a far more unstable world economy with regular crises which especially impact neo-colonial countries like Nigeria. Nevertheless, Nigeria commands far more economic resources today than was the case half a century ago which makes it all the more sad and unacceptable for President Tinubu to claim that the government does not have enough resources to fund public education. Unfortunately what has happened is that instead of increasing funding to public education, healthcare and their social amenities, Nigeria's crooked capitalist elite simply increased their plundering of the wealth.



As things are today, Nigeria is rich enough not only to fund public education but to provide free, functional and democratically-managed public education at all levels. The only obstacle is corruption and capitalism. Of course corruption is an enormous drain and its elimination would begin to alleviate the situation. But fundamentally it is necessary to tackle head-on the capitalists' greed for profit. If Nigeria's wealth is democratically owned, planned and managed, Nigeria's resources will be more available to fund what matters. It is not a coincidence that President Tinubu who is saying Nigeria is too poor to fund education is also running one of the most profligate government in the history of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. For instance, a Premium Times report shows that President Tinubu spent over 3 billion naira to ferry over 400 delegates to COP 28 in Dubai – a top shopping destination for Nigeria's elite. Nigeria's total delegation to COP 28 was the third largest and equal to that of China!

Now according to the 2024 appropriation bill, President Tinubu and the Vice President will spend a total of N10.13 billion on meals and travels in the year 2024. Feeding of animals at a zoo in Aso Rock will gulp N201.4 million, renovation of the residences of the president and the vice president will gulp N800 million. This is aside the N13.5 billion already approved for same renovation in the 2023 supplementary budget. Also honorarium and sitting allowance for President Tinubu and his Vice is N152. 5 million and N67.3 million, respectively. A poor country will never be able to afford this level of opulence for its leaders. That the government could allocate these juicy amounts for its own convenience is the clearest evidence yet that Nigeria is not poor, the only problem is that Nigeria's wealth is being misallocated to finance the greed and opulence of a few while public education and social amenities are abandoned.

### ALTERNATIVE FUNDING OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

We are not critics who criticize for the sake of it and cannot provide a



concrete solution. We have a clear, actionable and effective roadmap for rejuvenation of the education sector and well as concrete proposals about how the needed resources can be found. And the way to go is simple. Over 13 years ago, ASUU had an agreement with government to inject a minimum of 1.3 trillion Naira into public Universities in six tranches covering a period of six years in order to begin to address the infrastructural gap afflicting public Universities. This translates to the sum of about 216 billion annually. Only one tranche of N200 billion has been paid so far. We have to take a decision that a country with a collapsing education sector cannot afford opulence for its leaders while neglecting the education and future of the next generation. Moreso, if leaders demand sacrifice from citizens, it is only logical that they lead



first by example. As they say, he who comes to equity must come with clean hands.

While Nigeria needs fundamental change to provide for the needs of its population, immediate action can begin to improve things. From our calculations, instead of the miserable and inadequate N50 billion being proposed for a students' loan policy, Nigeria can raise an annual sum of

N1, 767, 820, 800 trillion (One trillion, seven hundred and sixty-seven billion, eight hundred and twenty million, eight hundred thousand naira) as additional fund to inject into tertiary education. These monies can be saved if the following profligacies of political office holders and conduit pipe for corruption are curbed:

**(1) EIGHT BILLION, FOUR HUNDRED MILLION NAIRA:** The total amount we can save in one year if we decide to cancel the appropriation of N6.9 billion and N1.5 billion meant to buy vehicles for the Presidency and the illegal and unconstitutional office of the first lady in the 2023 supplementary budget. All that is needed for this to happen is for President Tinubu and his wife to agree to tighten their belt and make do with the vehicles their predecessor left which are still functioning and are in the Aso rock car pool.

**(2) FOURTEEN BILLION, THREE HUNDRED MILLION NAIRA:** The total amount we will save in one year if we cancel the renovation of the residences of President Tinubu and his Vice President. It is not as if their predecessors vandalized the residences or went away with the furniture and electronics and if they did, they should be prosecuted. The money earmarked for the renovations will be more useful to assist thousands of Nigerian students in public tertiary institutions across the country who are sleeping rough in bed bug infested mattresses in ramshackle hostels.

**(3) TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY MILLION AND EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND NAIRA:** The total amount that would be saved on an annual basis if President Tinubu and his Vice, Shettima can agree to forfeit their sitting allowance and honourarium.

**(4) TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY BILLION, FOUR HUNDRED MILLION NAIRA ONLY:** The total amount we can save on an annual basis if we decide to cancel security votes which is a slush fund by governors to do whatever they like. For our calculation, we used Osun state as a baseline. According to Ademola Adeleke, the Governor of

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Osun State, his monthly security vote is N600 million (Vanguard newspaper, 5 October 2023). If Osun, a tiny state, gives 600 million for security vote, just imagine what Lagos or Rivers State security vote will amount to. Nevertheless, even assuming they all collect 600 million per month, cancelling this practice will generate over 200 billion annually.

#### **(5) THIRTY-FOUR BILLION, FIVE HUNDRED MILLION**

**NAIRA:** The total amount we can save annually if members of the National Assembly take a 50 percent pay cut in the interest of the nation. According to a thinktank, Stears, the entire National Assembly of 109 Senators and 260 House of Representatives cost the country a total of N69 billion annually in salary and allowances – equal to the salaries 191, 954 civil servants earning N30, 000 minimum wage. Nigeria's lawmakers are the highest paid in the world earning several times more than their counterparts in the US and Europe. Certainly, a cash-strapped country should not be able to fund that level of greed.

#### **(6) ONE TRILLION, FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY BILLION**

**NAIRA:** The total amount of money we can save annually if Nigeria cancels the fraudulent contract system which is a conduit pipe for corruption and instead begins to execute capital project through a democratically-controlled Public Works System. According to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria lost at least 2.9 trillion within a period of two years (2018 – 2020) to contract and procurement fraud (Independent newspaper, 13 November 2023). Through the public works system, especially if it is subjected to democratic control and oversight of workers, we can eliminate this contracting fraud while ensuring that all projects are carried out by the Public Works Department thereby blocking the leakage through which budget allocations are routinely stolen.

## **CONCLUSION**

You will agree with us that injecting an annual sum of N1.7 trillion into public universities, polytechnics and colleges of education will make far more difference in the education sector. This kind of additional funding on an annual basis can help to gradually bring down the cost of higher education, begin to fix infrastructural gap while expanding access. And if this kind of money is available, then why should Nigerian students be burdened with students loan and lifelong indebtedness? This is unfair and Nigerian students should not accept that their own future should be sacrificed for the comfort and luxury of the elite. As we have proven, there is no justification for the students' loan and government's argument that Nigeria is cash-strapped is false. Simply by cutting down waste and blocking leakages, Nigeria can save enough money to begin to revamp public education. We hereby call on all Nigerian students and education workers to reject the students' loan policy and join us to begin to fight for a cut in government profligacy in order to make this money available.

But there are even still other funding sources through which additional resources can be secured for public education including recovery of looted funds through diligent investigation and expeditious prosecution of corrupt politicians and their accomplices. Of course, we understand that apart from public education, there are other important sectors that needs urgent funding like public health care, housing, electricity etc. This is why we advocate for the public ownership of the oil and gas sector, banks, large industries and other key sectors of Nigeria's economy under workers democratic control and management. With this measure especially if based on a Socialist plan, it would become possible to unlock far more resources to fund all other important basic amenities like public healthcare, building of decent homes, public infrastructures and to improve people's wellbeing.

At the moment, over 80 percent of Nigeria's wealth lies in the hands of less than 2 percent of the population – the rich few and the multinational corporations plundering Nigeria's wealth. This is the outcome of

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capitalism – a social and economic system that is based on class exploitation and oppression. We need to end capitalism and enthrone a workers and poor people's government armed with Socialist programme involving the democratic plan of Nigeria's economy to meet the needs of all instead of the greed of a few.

However, it is not enough to demand or fight for adequate funding of public education, it has to be matched with the demand for democratic management of finances of schools to involve elected representatives of academic and non-academic staffs, and students, all recallable by their electors, in order to guarantee the judicious use of finances of the schools. It is a fact that the problem of education institutions is not only about funding but also that of mismanagement and looting of government allocations and internal generated revenues by the school administrators. For instance, many university vice-chancellors have been indicted of frauds and stealing of funds.

In conclusion, we have gone at great length to undertake a detailed examination of the Students Loan Act for the benefit of those who applaud it out of ignorance. It is worth stressing however that even if the Student Loan Act is reviewed such that all the absurdities we noted above are removed or amended, the scheme will still not in any way solve the problem of access to higher education. This is because the solution to the problems of public education in Nigeria is proper funding and democratic management of schools. This is the only way to ensure that children of working people and the poor masses are able to go to school.

### CARDINAL DEMANDS

We invite all those who agree with the above to join us in the Education Rights Campaign (ERC) to begin to fight for the following:

- 1) Conversion of the Students loan into a grant to support the living expenses of undergraduates.
- 2) Reversal of all hiked fees

- 3) Increase in allocation to education in the 2024 appropriation bill from 7.9 percent to 15 percent of the total budget.
- 4) Slash in the profligate expenses, salaries and allowances of political office holders and cancelation of fraudulent contract system in order to raise additional sum of 1.7 trillion annually to revamp public Universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.
- 5) Democratic management of our schools.
- 6) End to attacks on democratic rights. For the reinstatement of all victimized students and staff activists and restoration of all banned unions.
- 7) Nationalisation of the commanding heights of Nigeria's economy under democratic workers control and management.



## EDUCATION RIGHTS CAMPAIGN (ERC)

This pamphlet is produced by the Education Rights Campaign (ERC) with the support of ActionAid Nigeria. The ERC is a campaign platform of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) which is an affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI). If you agree with our analysis above, please join the ERC and organize a branch on your campus. The ERC is looking forward to expanding its network across campuses nationwide in order to be able to enhance the fighting capacity of Nigerian students to resist all anti-poor education policies that violate our inalienable rights to education as well as attacks on democratic rights.

If you are interested in further discussion or you want to know how to join, please reach out to us via the following:

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