

# POVERTY IN OIL RICH NIGERIA: The Ruling Elites Wage Class War on Public Education

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*Despite all the crocodile tears shed by Nigeria's ruling elites about the country's abysmal reading culture and declining education standards, the glaring fact is that they have overseen the demise of public education.*

Nothing exemplifies this neglect of public education more than the decrepit state of Nigeria's public libraries. I am not referring to various elite libraries like the presidential library, but those that should be available to the vast majority of youth and poor Nigerians, who constitute the majority of this West African country's population.

I was desperately in need of some literatures, but with dearth of functional and well-stocked bookstores in Osun State and quantity of work to be done, I had to make use of public libraries within reach, hoping to get more than I would need. Based on my previous experience with the local government library in Ile-Ife town, I resolved to approach the national and state libraries in the state capital, as the process of accessing a relatively better-equipped university library seemed cumbersome. As a reference, I was at the local government library sometime in 2004.

What I met was terrible. Aside from the lack of any sign of books in the library, the place was simply inhabitable – dilapidated with dangerously dangling ceilings, patently dirty environment, etc. Notwithstanding this experience, I visited the library again, hoping that something positive would have changed in eight years. Some things actually changed, but not to justify eight years of unprecedented wealth available to the rulers government from Nigeria's vast oil resources.

If, despite the huge resources in the nation's coffers, this is the paltry level of 'progress' that the nation has achieved, then the country is in a mess.

Public education facilities across Nigeria – a leading OPEC member and the most populous in Africa – reflects the near stagnation the capitalist class has imposed on the majority.

The dire state of public libraries in Nigeria speaks volumes about the cynical attitude of the ruling elite. From my understanding public libraries should be able to serve the knowledge quest of every strata of the society. They should be places where government rhetoric of "total development of the people" are translated to realities. A well-organized and developed library system can serve as a tool for national development, but not it seems in Nigeria.

With a well-funded and well-organized library system, it would be possible to support and

develop our local authors while also developing generations of readers and engaging youth in active intellectual work.

Furthermore, it would create generations of critical minds who will have access to information and will be able to ask questions about the running of society. However, it is clear that the Nigerian ruling elite is well aware of this “danger”.

The example of the completely broken down public library system reflects this much. Nigerian ruling elites, based on their commitment to neo-liberal, neo-colonial policies of privatization, commercialization, deregulation, public private partnership, among other anti-poor policies, do not believe that public education should be made available to the majority of people. Indeed, an illiterate society is a plus for treasury looters, and self-serving political class.

To the Nigerian ruling class, education is a commodity that must be bought and sold in the market for those who can afford it, and not a tool for development.

Nigeria’s labour unions and student groups must organize campaigns around issues affecting education and future of youth. Ultimately, the labour movement must champion the building of a working people’s party, built on the foundation of egalitarianism and commitment to mass public work, to liberate political power from the hands of current anti-development rulers in Nigeria.

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