

**CREATION OF GLOBAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
IN
NIGERIA/RIVER STATE
(GUS/NIGERIA/RS)**

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ABSTRACT:

The challenge of the digital divide facing developing countries needs to be addressed in order that millions of people in developing countries can participate in the Knowledge economy. Global University System (GUS) by offering e-learning and e-healthcare to rural and urban vulnerable communities will promote social equity through global knowledge sharing and access to global resources in health and education. GUS will also promote international prosperity, justice and peace through globally collaborative R&D.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been described as the global century with its transformation of cultures and social systems. This transformation is aided by technology and liberalization. However, the digital divide has widened to levels of declining social equity with resultant social instability in many developing countries.

Globally linked e-learning and e-healthcare systems will enable policymakers, educators, youth, and civil society to engage in shared learning and delivery of education and healthcare to promote global prosperity, justice and peace. This is the motivation for a consortium of Universities and Community Development Centers known as the Global University System.

2. GLOBAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM (GUS)

GUS is a network of distance-learning Universities and Community Development Centers using broadband Internet and multi-media technology, with the objective of closing the digital divide and to improve e-learning and e-healthcare services in rural/remote areas of developing countries (Utsumi, et. al., 2003). It seeks to link a network of universities in developed and developing countries for the purpose of collaborative learning, systems simulation, and peace gaming. In this way, education and health skills could be developed to improve human well-being on a global scale.

GUS will be based on Universities in developing countries as the Knowledge-centers with a network of community development stations such as health centers, libraries and learning centers forming the Local Community Development Network (LCDN). The headquarters of GUS is the Global E-learning Center at the University of Tampere in Finland, directed by UNESCO/UNITWIN Networking Chair, Tapio Varis (Varis, et. al., 2003). Those institutions who are affiliated with GUS become members of the GUS/UNESCO/UNITWIN Networking Chair program.

3. RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (RSUST)

RSUST was founded in 1980 in Port Harcourt, Nigeria as the evolution of College of Science and Technology which was created soon after the Nigerian civil war in 1970. A cardinal objective of RSUST is to address the challenges of scientific and technological manpower facing the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Since its creation, the institution has grown to host about six (6) Faculties and six (6) Institutes/Centers. These include the Faculties of Agriculture, Engineering, Science, Management Sciences, Technical and Science Education and Environmental Sciences.

Situated in the oil- and gas-producing region of Nigeria, RSUST has the potentials of technological leadership in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and related disciplines for driving the economic, social, and environmental development of Nigeria.

4. CREATION OF GUS/NIGERIA/RIVER STATE (GUS/NIGERIA/RS)

4.1 Background:

In 2004, Utsumi and Eke undertook a fact-finding tour to some five (5) Universities in Nigeria which included :

- University of Jos
- University of Ife (OAU)
- Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO)
- Abia State University Teaching Hospital, Aba
- Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST).

The team also visited the Japanese Embassy and The World Bank Country Office in Nigeria. The outcomes of the visit showed that there was extraordinary interest and willingness to cooperate in the formation of GUS/Nigeria (Utsumi and Eke, 2004).

4.2 GUS/Nigeria/RS Project Concept:

The creation of GUS/Nigeria/RS will involve establishing a network of Nigerian Universities in River State, Nigeria/RS-Net and a Local Community Development Network (LCDN) to link participating Universities and community development centers locally. This local network will partner with GUS to facilitate connectivity using broadband Internet network for e-learners and e-healthcare providers. Thus, Universities, health centers, libraries, local government agencies, elementary and secondary schools in River State of Nigeria will be linked in the GUS/Nigeria/RS consortium. RSUST will serve as the River State hub and as the Secretariat of GUS/Nigeria/RS.

In outline, the following is a summary of GUS/Nigeria/RS project concept:

- Proposed GUS/Nigeria/RS will link rural communities and support distance learning and e-healthcare through:
 - (a) regional technological infrastructure;
 - (b) programs and academic content to build stakeholders' capacity.
- Both the infrastructure and programs will be supplied by:
 - (a) exchanges of educational courses and their credits through broadband Internet;
 - (b) promotion of community development;
 - (c) collaborative Research and Development (R&D).
- Focus on e-learning and e-healthcare as foundations for rapid start-up.
- E-University integrates the resources of participating Universities in River State and gives them access to specialized courses globally.
- GUS/Nigeria/RS will provide tools, systems, and partnerships/funding opportunities to strengthen local capacity for distance learning and e-healthcare delivery.

4.3 Goals:

The goals of GUS/Nigeria/RS are:

- To use broadband internet (NIGERIA/RS-NET) of Universities, research centers and institutions of learning in enhancing their interaction as well as link them with their communities for enabling life-long learning to increase productivity and for poverty reduction.
- To use Local Community Development Networks (LCDNs) in linking diverse rural communities for knowledge sharing and sustainable community development.

5. PLANNING FOR GUS/NIGERIA/RS

At the Planning workshop, the following Working groups will be formed:

5.1 Infrastructure:

The regional satellite hub will serve as the Internet Service Provider (ISP) for not-for-profit organizations in the region and as the gateway to the outside world.

GUS/Nigeria/RS consortium members will be connected to high speed Internet networks in EU, USA, and Japan. With advanced wireless communication such as WiMAX (World-wide Interoperability for Microwave Access), the laptop computers of e-learners will be linked with capabilities for Internet telephony, fax, voice mail, e-mail, Web access, video-conferencing etc.

5.2 Global E-learning:

The GUS will be anchored in River State to enhance e-learning for life-long learners in their communities and for the development of technical and professional human capital and public enlightenment. Sustainability of global e-learning will be achieved through links with Universities and other academic institutions in EU, USA, Japan and other industrial countries.

5.3 Global e-Healthcare/Telemedicine:

GUS/Nigeria/RS will have e-healthcare/telemedicine as a focus area to train healthcare professionals to use computers effectively in diagnostics and in tracking patients through treatment and recovery. Medical records will be computerized including lab results, drug data, and records of office visits in text files, which would be standardized in a format that could be shared.

5.4 Community Development:

Learners, faculties, and policymakers will promote community development at local, regional, and national levels especially the entrepreneurial initiatives for creating the Knowledge Economy.

5.5 Globally Collaborative R&D:

Participating institutions will form the global forum for exchange of ideas and information and for conducting R&D in areas such as Globally Collaborative Environmental Peace Gaming (GCEPG) and Global Socio-Economic-Energy-Environment Development (GSEED) (Utsumi, 2003 and Utsumi, 2007).

6. ACTION PLAN

6.1 Fact-Finding and Assessment Trip:

This has been conducted (Utsumi and Eke, 2004).

6.2 Planning Workshop:

This should be conducted during the Second Quarter of 2008 at the Secretariat in Port Harcourt. During this Workshop, the Working groups will initiate detailed proposals for attracting funding.

6.3 Design Phase:

During this phase, we will conduct market surveys, feasibility studies, systems design of infrastructure and administrative structure. We will also conduct a business plan for maximizing the effectiveness and sustainability of the project GUS/Nigeria/RS. This phase should produce the project document for funding partners and should be completed by the Fourth Quarter of 2008.

7. FUNDING

GUS projects will seek funding from Japanese Government's Official Development Assistance (ODA), Japanese Technical Assistance funds and Internet Technology and Content Development funds of Europe and USA.

8. CONCLUSION

GUS and its collaborative Research and Development programs will require national and international collaboration in order to achieve success. Given the growing ambitions of the project, it will need a critical mass of institutions and partners in developing countries for its realization.

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