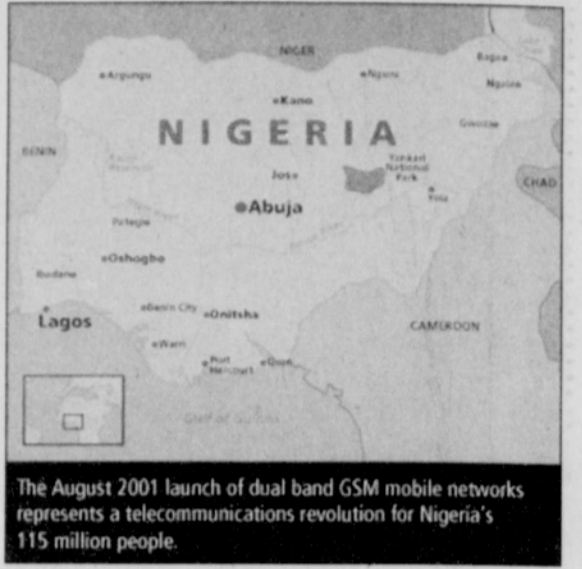


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# Countries of Africa: Nigeria's Independence Brings Hope to Africans

BY RON WEBER



The August 2001 launch of dual band GSM mobile networks represents a telecommunications revolution for Nigeria's 115 million people.

We think about crowded California with its 35 million people. Imagine an area with more than twice as much land and almost 150 million people. Unlike our western sunshine state, Nigeria is overrun with poverty and the average citizen is only expected to live to 50.

This African nation is rich in natural resources such as gas and oil, but most of the money is closely held by a small percentage of the population. Nigeria is also facing huge medical crises in fighting HIV/AIDS. Although massive advertising campaigns have emphasized the need for monogamous marriages, celibacy until marriage and safe sex, the battle is far from over.

Four out of 10 Nigerian adults are unable to read or write. The illiteracy makes most health warning pamphlets and similar literature ineffective. About 60 percent of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line. Proper medical care is out of the question for many of them. As many cannot afford to go to a doctor, sexually communicated diseases often go unnoticed until it is too late.

The majority of the nation's labor force is found in agriculture. The remainder is found in service jobs and industry. Agricultural products include cocoa, peanuts, palm oil, corn, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava (tapioca), yams, rubber, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, timber, and fish. Natural Resources consist of natural gas, oil, tin, colum-

bite, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, and zinc.

Nigeria's is basically divided into three areas. The north is arid and unchanging. The center is very tropical with good plant growth, while the south is basically blistering hot and does not have enough water or cultivatable land. To complicate matters even more, various parts of the country are prone to flash floods and severe droughts.

A current environmental issue is the rapid deforestation of the land. Closely behind is the damage to the land from ongoing massive oil spills. So much oil is being pulled out of the ground so fast that spills are often ignored. Two and one half million barrels of oil are exported daily, with over 15 and a half billion cubic meters of natural gas. Urban water and air pollution along with rapid urbanization are also major concerns.

With many areas suffering from land that can't be farmed, people are moving into the cities causing overcrowding and sanitary problems.

Religiously, Nigeria is split almost in half. Fifty percent are Muslim,

forty percent are Christian and ten percent are local indigenous beliefs. While over 250 ethnic groups inhabit Nigeria, English is the official language. Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, and Fulani are some of the more common indigenous languages.

The government is considered "republic," "transitioning from military to civilian rule," with Olusegun Obasanjo as the country's president. Nigeria's independence was gained in the United Kingdom in 1960. Nigeria has three television stations, two of which are government controlled and the third closely monitored. As a republic, people expect greater freedoms to come.

Some of Obasanjo's top political goals are reforms in health care, education, and moderate transfer of the nation's vast petroleum dollars to those in need.

## New Courses Connect Oregon, Africa

The University of Oregon in Eugene will increase African studies this fall and expand the college's identity as an international university by offering an undergraduate certificate and eventually a minor in African Studies.

"Our students need to know about Africa's richness and diversity," said Stephen Wooten, UO assistant professor of international

studies and anthropology.

The additional course offerings are made possible by a \$160,000 grant from the U.S. Dept. of Education.

"With this grant, we can teach more and better courses on Africa and send more students to the continent," Wooten said. "The grant also supports research to identify how and where Africa is repre-

sented in Oregon, and to explore the many ways in which Oregon is visible in Africa through the work of many organizations and companies."

The grant enriches and expands the current Swahili language offerings; adds the languages of Bamana and Wolof and creates new opportunities for students to study and intern in Africa.



## Better diversity and quality teachers

By Reg Weaver, President, National Education Association

May 3rd is National Teacher Day—a day to honor America's classroom teachers.

When it comes to expectations, we have high ones for America's public school teachers. We want them to help students to learn to read and write and understand math and science. We want them to help students learn to think, analyze and create. We want them to model and teach values such as hard work, respect and responsibility.

We want teachers to care. We want them to see our child as an individual, and we want them to tailor instruction to how our children best learn.

"We should treat teachers as professionals, not just test prep coaches, as is increasingly the case with the so-called No Child Left Behind Act."

America's public school teachers rise to the occasion in all of those areas. But when it comes to investing our hopes and dreams into what teachers do, we should also be willing to invest in enhancing the teaching profession. Compensation is part of it. Salary, health care and retirement ought to be set at levels that truly attract and keep quality people in jobs that are physically, intellectually and emotionally challenging.

We should also invest in the kinds of efforts that make a difference, such as better preparation programs, good mentoring programs and quality professional development. And we should treat teachers as professionals, not just test prep coaches, as is increasingly the case with the so-called No Child Left Behind Act.



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At the same time that we address teacher quality and the role of teachers in the classroom, we should also work to enhance the diversity of the teaching profession. A more diverse teaching force advances significant educational goals—preparing students for the workplace they will encounter, making sure students of both genders and all racial and ethnic backgrounds are taught by people they can identify with, and making sure every school has a ready resource for understanding cultural distinctions and how they affect learning styles.

If you can read this, thank a teacher. And if you want to help improve America's schools, give teachers the thanks and support they deserve.

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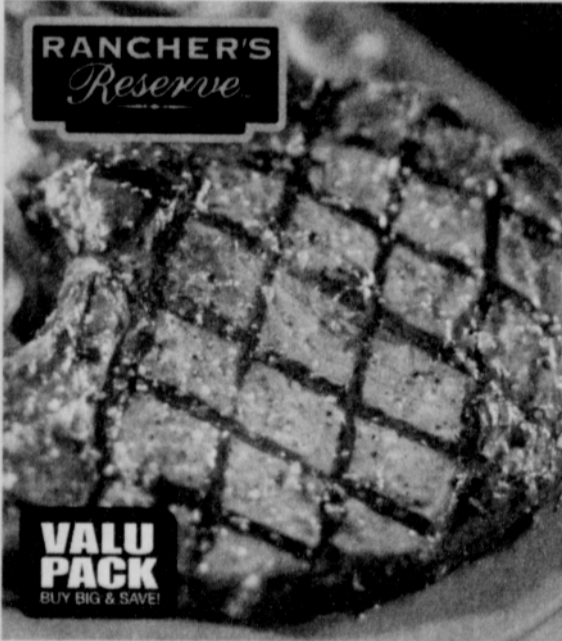
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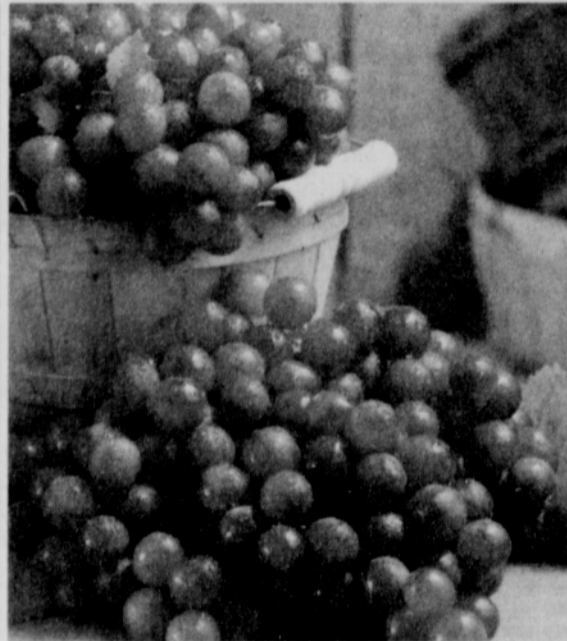
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