The comparison that is often made between Soviet and American views of human rights merits re-examination with respect to education and Third World countries. Conventional wisdom places the American philosophy of human rights wholly on the side of political and civil rights. By contrast, the Soviet emphasis is on social and economic rights. What are we to make of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘Everyone has the right to education’? Article 26 goes on to specify that education shall be provided free in signatory states at least for young people through what is described as the elementary and fundamental levels of education. It urges that technical and professional education be made generally available and that ‘higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’. Not surprisingly, Third World countries have given special attention to this article especially in their early history as new nation states. In this paper, I have chosen Nigeria to illustrate trends in educational policy, but its experience has been repeated in varying degree in other new nations.

Emphasis on education has been a cornerstone of Third World development in at least three distinct periods: the colonial period, the immediate post-colonial period of institution building, and the period some describe as education for development. In each period, the emphasis changed but the primacy of education was maintained. Spokesmen for new approaches understandably stressed change above continuity. Close examination of institutional development in the three eras, however, reveals persistent patterns and commitments at work.

THE COLONIAL ERA

Education in the colonial era mirrored the different national traditions and their unique and distinct approaches and emphasis. The British tradition, shaped by the values of Oxbridge, saw the educational
mission as the training of leaders. It would be a travesty of justice, a British friend was wont to say, to seek to make the unequal equal. After all, Article 26 had been specific in connecting access to higher education with merit. The institutionalisation of this tradition both preceded and followed higher education. High-quality private preparatory schools were feeders for universities. For those unschooled in such traditions, it was remarkable how many graduates of a single preparatory school inspired by a single legendary headmaster found their way into positions of leadership. Alex Kwapong, when he was vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana at Legon, before going on to become rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, used to recite the names of prominent Ghanaian leaders who were graduates of such a school and then of Legon.

The British tradition encouraged co-operation and assistance from outside because the focus of co-operation was clear-cut and definable. In building a cadre of personnel for the foreign service, the task seemed manageable by comparison with other national traditions. Several years before independence, a British Foreign Office official, Reginald Barrett, was seconded to the Nigerians. Almost immediately, he set about the task of identifying and recommending for training qualified young Nigerians who had shown promise and ability initially within the framework of the British Foreign Service and British higher education. Further opportunities soon emerged for training abroad and elsewhere. At a certain point co-operation with American institutions became possible through the initiative of American foundations. After Nigeria had achieved its independence, Barrett undertook to internationalise the programme with a travelling brief from private foundations to visit newly independent countries, or those soon to be independent. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, provided a home for his activities. Columbia University and the Institut Universitaire des Hautes Etudes Internationales in Geneva organised special programmes for young diplomats. What was striking was that Barrett continued to find the greatest response to his proposals for the training of young diplomats in Anglophone countries. The reason was not hard to discover. It stemmed from the historic British practice of emphasising the identification and nurturing of leaders. Higher education for the British remained 'a school for statesmen'.'

The French tradition by contrast placed emphasis on French culture. The 'mission civilisatrice' had as its core the spreading of