Knowledge, they say, is power. But in Osun State, under the leadership of Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, power seems to have changed hand. In the past, to gain knowledge, any knowledge, you would have needed to travel to the Whiteman’s country or land, across the seas, to practically beg him to share some of his knowledge with you.

But today, Aregbesola, has succeeded in changing the order of things with his O’MEALS (where O is for Osun) school feeding project or programme. The result is that, on account of his experience/knowledge, today, he is being invited here and there, to lecture those of us, Blacks and Whites, who find his achievement with it, something out of this world.

Where it Began

The height of it came when he was invited, early this year, by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Agriculture and Food for Development and the Partnership for Child Development (PCD), Imperial College London, to address the United Kingdom’s House of Commons, on Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme (O’MEALS), which they acknowledged as a successful model to be copied worldwide.

Learning from the O’MEALS Programme

Months later, Dr. Lesley Drake, Executive Director, Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London at a workshop with the theme: “Technical Meeting on Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme (O-Meals),” held from May 21 - 23, at Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, Osogbo, still recalls the aftermath of that Ogbeni Aregbesola’s outing in UK parliament.
“The UK has now adopted the school feeding programme,” she told Education Review. “Actually, the rationale for inviting the Osun State governor is to see how well he is doing it here and how we can adopt the practice in England, Scotland and Wales and in many countries in Europe. So the message of homegrown school feeding is growing globally and the Governor of Osun State has been the primary motivator in that regard.”

It was in order to impart the knowledge not only to the UK parliament and other international communities but to also his fellow Nigerians, that the state government, in partnership with PCD, Vitol, etc, organized the three-day workshop.

**School Feeding as a Social Safety Net**

Professor Donald Bundy from the World Bank also who spoke on the topic “Levelling the Playing Field: Reasons We Feed Children” noted that, among other things, it improves school attendance, acts as a sort of social security net for the poorest of school children and provides a ready market for local farmers and traders.

PCD’s Senior Programmes Manager for West Africa, Daniel Mumuni spoke on the topic: “Home Grown School Feeding: Developing Local Agriculture, Nourishing Young Minds” he observed that the programme worked and is working in Osun State because of high level political support and added that such political support is needed to make it work in other interested states or
countries. But he emphasized the need for close monitoring as to evaluate its success or otherwise at any given point in time.

Aregbesola agrees. “We are having security challenges big enough to engage global attention because we have neglected education in the past,” he said in a keynote address he presented at the occasion. “We are reaping the fruits now. Well-educated children will have the confidence to face the future and remake their world in their own image. Uneducated or badly educated children on the other hand are not only easy recruits for violent gangs, they are incapable of conceiving beauty and all that is good about man, the environment and the good life. They are naturally predisposed to nihilism.

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