

Why the US Peace Corps is proud of Atiku Abubakar

We need people to connect, to live and work in a network...build more bridges, bring down walls

In the afternoon of Saturday, 24 September, the National Theatre in Washington, DC, United States of America, hosted a panel, "Conversations: The Future of the Peace Corps" organised as part of the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Peace Corps, which was launched in March 1961 by President John F. Kennedy.

The master of ceremonies/moderator was Bill Moyers, a distinguished journalist who was the founding deputy director of the Corps (1962-1963), and White House Press Secretary in the administration of President Lyndon Johnson (1965-1967).

Among the scheduled panellists were Dr Alejandro Toledo, president of Peru (2001-2006); Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, UN adviser, former Finance Minister and 2009 presidential candidate in Afghanistan, and Atiku Abubakar, Vice President of Nigeria (1999-2007). The trio are "graduates" of the Peace Corps.

Patricia Wand, a board member of the National Peace Corps Association, an independent organisation for current and returned volunteers, says Toledo told the audience that he was found by Peace Corps volunteers in a Peruvian slum "looking for a way to go school. They took him into their house; fed, clothed and supported him through high school. (They) helped him to get to the University of San Francisco, where he earned the bachelors degree and later went on to earn a doctorate at Stanford University." Wand reports Ahmadzai saying he learned the English language from PCVs, who taught him in Kabul from 1963 to 1966.

Atiku encountered Peace Corps volunteers at the Adamawa Provincial Secondary School in Yola. He had been admitted into the school, founded by the

British colonialists in 1920 as Adamawa Middle School, in January 1961, and was one of 60 young boys from Adamawa, Sardauna and Benue Provinces admitted into the school that year. One of the more popular secondary schools in the then Northern Region, its alumni include Adamawa State Governor Murtala Nyako and former Inspector General of Police Mohammed Gambo Jimeta.

Atiku hated memorising stuff. So, the coming of the Peace Corps volunteers in 1962 with a pedagogy that allowed the students to be able to think about solutions to problems endeared him to the PCVs who included Rod Larson, Steve Clapp, Lowell Fewster and Steve Krasner.

Fewster, Clapp and Larson attended the Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebration in Washington (see photo). Clapp, now 72 and a senior editor at *Food Chemical News*, was dormitory master when Atiku was a boarder at Adamawa Provincial. In Atiku's report card that he signed as dormitory master, he wrote: "A very well-behaved and hardworking member of the house (Wazirawa House)." In that same report, Fewster, a retired American Baptist minister, who was then the Form Master, wrote on Atiku thus: "A good form member and one of the better students in the form." Clapp has a book on his Peace Corps experience, entitled *"Africa Remembered: Adventures in Post-Colonial Nigeria and Beyond."* (It's available on Amazon). Clapp is definitely proud of Atiku as this citation on LinkedIn suggests – "I taught English at a boys' secondary boarding school in Yola, Nigeria. One of our school boys, Atiku Abubakar, became the nation's vice president and helped found the new American University of Nigeria, in Yola."

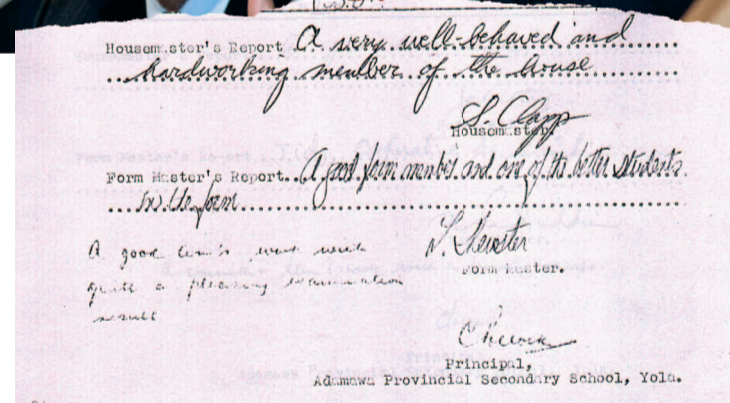
Clapp recalls that at a dinner in 2003 hosted in Atiku's honour by the American University in Washington, DC, at which he was the only one of Atiku's former Peace Corps teachers present, Atiku said: "I preferred the American way of teaching but I learned to give British answers." (It would be



L-R: Harvey Flad, who was a Peace Corps teacher in Ganye; Lowell Fewster, a retired executive minister who remembers Atiku as a schoolboy in Yola; Margee Ensign, president of the American University of Nigeria; Rod Larson, who taught physics and chemistry and is remembered fondly by Atiku; and Steve Clapp (who gladly provided the picture)



Bill Moyers (right) and Dr Ashraf Ahmadzai
RIGHT: the report sheet he signed for Atiku Abubakar



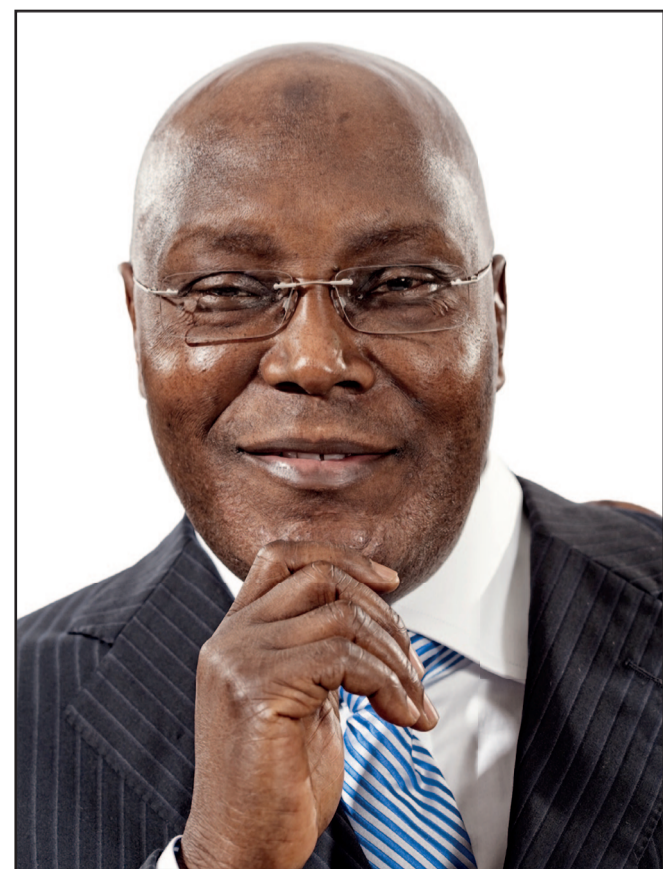
nice to know what "British answers" are).

It is that teaching style that also influenced him in choosing the American style of learning for AUN. As Clapp noted on his LinkedIn profile, he and four of his colleagues were nominated for the Sargent Shriver Humanitarian Service Award "for our role in inspiring Atiku to found a private university in Africa."

These words by Atiku Abubakar appeared to have struck many chords as

they embody the letter and spirit of the US Peace Corps: 'The Peace Corps is committed to avoiding a clash of cultures and that is what the world needs. There should be no fortress for Islam, no fortress for Buddhism; we need people to connect, to live and work in a network.'

President Kennedy may not have used the word, "network" in March 1961, but the spirit was to, among other things, encourage inter-cultural relationships. The Corps' three goals include "providing technical assistance, helping people outside the United States to understand US culture, and helping Americans to understand the cultures of other countries." In a way, that is what Atiku Abubakar's AUN, in Yola, is also fostering – apart from imparting the American type of education to younger ones, some of whom, like him, would have detested learning by rote. To paraphrase Isaac Newton, it is building more bridges and bringing down the walls.



Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar



Atiku (sitting third from right) at Adamawa Provincial Secondary School