

REPOSITIONING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A critical issue in the 21st Century will be the changes and adaptation required in agricultural education, for it to effectively contribute to improved food security, sustainable agricultural production and rural development. This paper points out some deficiencies in the agricultural extension: approaches used in Nigeria. Data from Nasarawa State of Nigeria are used to examine how extension agents unofficial communications with farmers, stimulate farmer-innovation in soil erosion control. This phenomenon is explained in terms of the integration of knowledge systems. The paper then derives some implications from the analysis, one of which is that agricultural extension and agricultural-knowledge utilization models of the Agricultural Knowledge System (AKS) need to be repositioned to clarify the distinction between the two and provide a better explanation of developing country Agricultural Knowledge Systems. Suggested policy measures include repositioning of Agricultural Education and practices, by extension organizations; reassessment of the contents, scope and didactic methodologies of extension approaches in Nigeria and more research to understand the processes of generation and transfer of new knowledge.

Introduction

"If agriculture is stagnant, it offers only a stagnant market, and inhibits the growth of the rest of the economy. The core of the doctrine 'Balance of growth, is that neglect to develop agriculture makes it difficult to develop anything else' (Lewis, 1961). For Nigeria (and many other developing countries) at present, agriculture remains the gateway to several desired ends, which includes poverty reduction, rural transformation, employment generation, food security and improved nutritional health profile of the citizenry, Harbison (1967), noted that modernizing nations may not solve many of their most pressing problems unless they find a way of "revolutionizing" rural life. The way out, it seems, is agriculture. Among Nigerian intellectual and policy makers, it does appear as if a broad consensus already exists in the direction that the nation's agriculture needs an all-embracing revolution; from the sphere of thought to an arena of action; from theories to practices, from history to practical confrontation of today's reality of gross neglect and absolute decline. This paper is to highlight the importance of agriculture in the world with particular reference to Nigeria. Agriculture being the bedrock of Nigeria's Economy before the discovery of Petroleum products popularly known as oil boom has declined. In this country before independence, farmers constituted 75% of the total population. But with the discovery of the oil, most Nigerians turned down the farming profession. This and other factors like government attitude towards agriculture, ignorance on the part of the people, lack of mechanized farming, poor agricultural education but to mention a few, set the agricultural sector backwards.

This led to low food production, which is inversely proportional to the population growth of this country. It is in the light of these, that this paper tries to highlight those areas which can reposition the agricultural sector back to its original quality and even suggest newer approaches to the development of agriculture through enhancing agricultural education programmes to the masses.

Meaning of Agricultural Education

Agricultural education may be defined in terms of:

- i. The training designed to advance agricultural science teacher's general proficiency in vocational agricultural lessons.
- ii- Training or retraining which is given in agriculture education department of post-secondary schools under public supervision and control; and
- iii- Provision of systematic learning experiences, which are designed to equip the student

teachers with skills, competencies, abilities, techniques, attitudes, knowledge's and meaningful practical training required for use in vocational agriculture, Akor, M.E. (1985), "The ironies of Nigeria's Green Revolution Programme."

The Brief History of Agricultural Decline in Nigeria

At independence¹ 1960, the agricultural sector was the most vibrant sector of the Nigerian economy. The sector provided not only food for the teeming population, but also employment, export earning and raw materials for industries. Agriculture was the pride of the nation, and effectively dominated the other sectors of the economy the contribution of agriculture to the nation's gross domestic (GDP) and export was quit significant. Until the early 1970s, agriculture remained the major development drive of the economy. Through its linkages, agriculture facilitated the other sectors of the economy. During this period, agriculture was regarded as main stay of the Nigerian economy. The sector employed 80% of the active population, contributed over 60% of the nations GDP and provided nearly 100% of the economy's food requirement (FOS 1996),

By 1971, however, the share of all Nigerian agricultural products in world production started declining just as the export 'of them. By 1974, the share of Nigerian cocoa in world output has declined, likewise, the value of these and other agricultural products in Nigeria's total export declined. Equally noticeable was the decline in output of staple foodstuffs as evident by a sustained rise in consumer 'price index for food during the period and increase food import. Overall, the growth rate of the sector maintains a downwards tread through the 1970s.

Although other sectors of the economy (mining) especially started experiencing growth, they neither had the corresponding growth effect on other sectors of the economy nor employment generation capacity as did the agricultural sector.

Quite a number of reasons have been advanced to explain the phenomenon of declined in agricultural production in Nigeria at late 1960s. These include;

- Unfavourable weather condition
- Inadequate supply of Agricultural Input
- Poor Marketing & other infrastructures
- Activities of the Marketing Board (domestic under-pricing of commodity)
- Rural urban migration
- Faulty domestic policies on agriculture

(Aboyade and Ayida, 1971; Olaloko, e'tal 1979; Ojaide 1993). The wealth from the oil that Nigerians and their governments made got trapped in the euphoria, which distracted both parties. But more crucially, policies and programmes aimed at. educating the general public on agriculture were mil implemented. Ideally the oil boom created ;m excellent financial opportunity for revamping agriculture, which started suffering setback. This opportunity was however, interpreted to mean an • emerging alternative source of revenue that was going to be long lasting.

The Nigerian policy makers were simply shortsighted and so floated policies and programmes that further sunk agriculture. It has been observed that the various policies implemented during the period have severed negative consequences on agriculture and the economy as a whole (Aboyade and Ayida. 1971).

Philosophy of Agricultural Education

The philosophy of Agricultural Education programme is tied with the national philosophy on agriculture for self-reliance based 'on provision of people endowed with a balanced approach between principles and practice of agriculture for academic and vocational ends.

Objectives of Agriculture Education

Agricultural education is a programme of instruction whose main objectives are to: -(i). Prepare individuals with the right attitude to, and knowledge/professional competence in vocational agriculture.

- (ii). Produce teachers who will be capable of motivating pupils to acquire interest in and aptitude for agriculture,
- (iii). Develop in the student teachers the appropriate communication skills for effective transmission of agricultural information to the students in the context of their environment.
- iv). Equip (he individuals; with adequate knowledge and ability to establish and manage a model school farm effectively; and provide: a sound background to enhance further academic and professional progression in agriculture. *Magnus Patrick UJo, (1997), "Introduction to Vocational & Technical Educational"*

Economic Goals Of Agricultural Education

The economic goals served by agricultural education are: -

- (i). To maintain a profitable, viable and efficient agricultural production sector capable of meeting all food and fibre demands while providing satisfactory incomes to farmer for use of land, labour, capital and management,
- (ii). To provide for an efficient, profitable and dynamic agric. Business sector consisting of both suppliers of inputs and handlers of agricultural outputs,
- (iii). To provide consumers with an abundance and variety of food and fibre at the lowest possible cost consistent with the proceeding goals.
- (iv). To conduct a food and fibre economy within the framework of a democratic society relying on the free market s\stem as much as possible with all proceeding goals,
- (v). To co-ordinate agricultural policy with all other public policies, including foreign policies, for the best interest of the nation and (he world. *Magnus Patrick I/do, (1997), "Introduction to Vocational & Technical Educational "*

The Way Forward-Policy Options

To achieve these targets, the following strategies will be employed: -

1. Vigorous implementation of the Presidential Initiatives on Cassava Rice. Vegetable oil, sugar, livestock, tree crops and cereals. Under this initiative, Nigeria hopes to generate as much as N3 billion annually form the export of agricultural products.
 2. Strengthening of agricultural research and revitalization of the agricultural training and streamlining the extension delivery system including of non government organizations (NGOs) and opinion leaders in extension delivery through capacity building and promotion of improved technologies that are appropriate to the needs of farmers.
 3. A review *of* the agricultural input supply and distribution system with a view to developing effective and sustainable private sector led input supply and distribution system.
 4. Promotion of integrated rural development-involving agricultural and non-agricultural activities and including the provision of physical infrastructure such as feeder roads, rural water supply, rural communications e.t.c.
 5. Encouraging states to develop projects of model rural communities and farm settlement adequately provided with feeder roads, boreholes, vocational training, simple farm tools and equipment, alternative energy source and communication centers for a whole some life to reduce rural-urban drift.
 6. Adequate capitalization of the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) to provide soft agricultural credit to the small farm-holder and rural farmers; the! NACRDB has been restructured and its mandate expanded to include full financial intermediation.
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7. Promotion of joint venture, private sector, and marketing companies to guarantee remunerative prices for fanners, stabilize consumer prices and provide alternative market for farm prepuce through buyer-of-last-resort mechanism.
 8. Promotion of all season farming through rain fed and irrigated farming with emphasis on *Fadama* agriculture as well as implementation of the programme for the massive production of tree crop seedlings.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined some past and present agricultural policies and programmes and identified as a major defect of many policies, the neglect of small holders farmer, the decline in agricultural extension, inadequate attention paid to social economic infrastructure in the rural areas, among others.

The paper submit that a reposition of agricultural extension services, schooling of farmers, provision of support services to farmers, public investment that reduces the transaction costs of farmers who mainly dwell in the rural areas would have a lot of output expansion effect on the Nigerian agricultural sector. The conclusion drawn is that: With the declining in the agricultural sector, the present rate agricultural growth in Nigeria will not be able to feed its people in the next decade unless there is a radical departure from existing attitude to investment in agriculture.

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