

# QUALITY REFORM IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A TOOL FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria has a National Policy on Education which was derived from its National goals and objectives of Education. This policy which has been reviewed four times contains the attributes through which the aspiration of Nigeria can be accomplished through Agricultural Education. This paper presents a review of experiences gained in implementing different reform measures to develop, enhance the existing agricultural education curriculum as a way forward to achieving self-reliance and sustainable development in Nigeria. It also considered the issues/challenges facing the realization of these attributes of the policy through Agricultural Education. This paper concluded that when individuals are given the necessary recognition, opportunities and training in Agricultural Education, they can contribute their quota towards making Nigeria a self-reliant Nation. Suggestions were further made on how to overcome the issues/challenges that might impede the attainment of the objectives of Agricultural Education in relation to curricular provisions in National Policy on Education.

Agriculture is the bedrock of economic development because it contributes meaningfully to the growth of the Nation's economy. The development of this sector of the economy cannot be achieved without an efficient agricultural education system. This could be realized if efforts are geared towards reforming the current state of agricultural Education in Nigeria. Economic development is the process whereby simple, low-income national economies

are transformed into modern industrial economies. Economic development first became a major concern after the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war which marked the era of European colonialism. Hornby (2000) defined reform as becoming or making better by correcting or making improvements. Reforms are geared towards alleviating the sufferings of the masses through introduction of novel ideas that bring to the barest minimum the operations of cheats, saboteurs, and enemies of progress. Reforms are not necessarily new policies but rather they are action plans geared towards improving the existing curriculum. In the education sector, reform does not mean a new education policy; rather, it is an action plan to improve education performance in terms of access and quality at every level of the education enterprise. Okeke (1985), viewed the renewal of curriculum as a revision or modification of an existing curriculum with the hope of providing a better quality programme. Literally, innovation refers to making changes or introducing new things into an existing curriculum.

Reforms are improvements on a system, an organization, laws, by making changes to them while innovation means the introduction of new things, ideas or ways of doing things. Agabi and Okorie (1999), looked at innovation as a positive planned and specific changes that facilitate the achievement of defined goals. When an innovation process is comprehensive, it assumes the status of a reform. Hence reforms in Agricultural education are those types of

comprehensive, deliberate, healthy or positive changes either in the content, methods, goals, policies, practices or ideologies that take place in the Agricultural education.

### **The Role of Agricultural Education in National Economic Growth for Sustainable Development**

Agriculture deals with the science and Art of production of crops and rearing of animals as well as the processing, preservation, storage, distribution and marketing of agricultural products for man's use (Ugboh and Osagiede 2010). Agriculture has been the main stay of the Nation's economy because agriculture contributes over 40% of Gross Domestic Product to the nation's economy. There is no nation of the world that does not depend on agricultural products for its survival. It is through agricultural activities that we have food we eat, the cloths we put on, the drugs we use in hospitals and of course the shelter we live in. Many times whenever development is mentioned, people always direct their minds to economic heights (Aneke, 2010).

Economic development means the harnessing of available resources by a people for the realization of their major economic objectives along the line of solving their articulated problems without deliberately acquiring more problem situations. Sustainable economic development involves the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. Sustainable economic development can be said to be the one that has clearly articulated these objectives and has achieved all or almost all of them within a time frame without harming the environment.

In Nigeria, attempt has been made to develop the agricultural sector of the economy. However, there have been some constraints to its development. These constraints ranged from excessive exploitation of peasant agriculturalists

and its resources to urbanization. These constraints if not tackled could thwart the efforts of government towards improving the livelihood of its citizens. Hence the government should formulate and implement policies that could enhance the development of agricultural sector of its economy through reforms which will help individuals contribute their quota to the development of the nation.

The rate and level of development of any nation is dependent on her level of agricultural development. In other wards food security is important to any nation that is in dire need of development. This is because a nation that cannot meet the basic food need (in terms of quality and quantity) of her populace is politically and economically unstable, such a nation could easily be maneuvered and threatened by more stable nations. This fear can most easily be overcome through the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from Science and Technology into Agricultural production. Also, the need for improvement in the state and condition of rural areas and their inhabitants is great. This is where agricultural education comes in. Agricultural Education is an aspect of agriculture that deals with the application of educational principles into the teaching and learning of agricultural concepts. Egbule (2004) defined agricultural education as the teaching of skills values, attributes and related knowledge in production, processing and marketing of agricultural products and related produce. Agricultural education can contribute towards transforming the individuals and the nation to heights that meet with global standard through:

1. Providing young people with sound knowledge, skills and creative abilities which they can translate into real agricultural production.
2. Producing more trained personnel involved in extension services for translating research

findings into field trials, adaptation and commercialization.

3. Providing training for specialists in agricultural occupations such as plant and animal breeding, plant and animal pathology, food processing and preservation, agricultural financing Insurance and rural sociology.
4. Providing farmers with the knowledge and skills for efficiency in production decision-making process.
5. Equipping students and all agricultural practitioners with the knowledge and facts about Nigeria's agricultural potentials, technology and environment.
6. Helping farmers and students appreciate positive values such as: good feeding habits, conservation of the natural resources; personal hygiene and maintenance of family life.
7. Preparing students for life-long learning in agriculture and related subjects as well as enabling them have an intelligent understanding of the problems and opportunities in their communities and environments.
8. Developing problem- solving and safety practices on students and other agricultural practitioners.

Eze (2008). Summed up the aims of agricultural education as:

1. Enhancing human skillful participation that will make him self-dependent and to contribute to national development.
2. Provide training for specialized agricultural occupations such as livestock, farming and

plant breeding, food storage and processing, agricultural financing and Insurance.

3. To help rural youth to develop an understanding of inter-relationship of urban and rural life and provide counseling about agricultural occupations and means of preparing for them.
4. To develop man in the entrepreneurial skills for a rewarding business in farming.
5. Importantly, to produce more trained personnel involved in extension services for the farmers. These extension staff will help to enhance development of rural farmers through translating research findings into the field of trial prior to commercial application.
6. To help educate graduates who will wish to remain in. academic environment either in teaching or in research from elementary through college and tertiary level.
7. To enhance the training of man in the community to accept the aspect of agriculture that is in conformity with the new trend of technology, globalization and advancement which are gradually changing those aspects of agriculture that are obsolete.

From the above aims of agricultural Education, it could be asserted that agricultural education is the pilot for technological growth and manpower development.

#### **The Concept of Self Reliance and its Effect on National Development**

The new international Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary (2004) defines self reliance as "reliance on one's own abilities, resources or judgment. Honby (2000) defined self- reliance as having or showing confidence in one's own powers or judgments." That is to say that a self-reliant person can face any challenge in life, is creative with an instinct to be very

useful to himself and his community. In the National Policy on Education (NPE), (2004) one of the national objectives is to build a united, strong and self-reliant nation. The achievement of this objective is aimed at improving the lives of the citizenry especially through agricultural education, so that they can contribute towards making Nigeria a self-reliant nation. Self-reliance is a conception in the nation's development plan in which the citizens of the society are mobilized in order to transform their physical, technology, political, administrative, economic and social environment for their general well-being and those of others (Ohiorhenuanu, 1988). Self-reliance involves getting people to utilize optimally more confidence in their own ingenuity and reduce their level of dependence on international organizations and foreign countries while attempting to obtain a better life for them. (Mbanefor, 1988). It is a catalyst for economic recovery, since it enhances among others, the social capacity of the country and technological advancement. As the population of Nigeria keeps increasing day in day out, there is need to embark on programmes that will enhance food production for her large population of people and boost the National Economy.

Introducing programmes that will foster self-reliance into Agricultural education will transform the citizen's attitude to work and skills in rendering services to their immediate community. Self-reliance programmes in Agricultural education will encourage the spirit of discovery, innovation and inventions, and will inculcate the urge for a worthwhile career choice for a perfect capital-oriented occupation (Nwokoye, 2003).

#### **Need to Reform Agricultural Education Curriculum for Self-Reliance and Economic Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The need for reforms in agricultural education in this era of technological

advancement of many nations cannot be overemphasized. It has become apparent that the physical accumulation of capital was not in itself the key to development, many analyses have positioned that lack of practical skills among the educated population are crucial factors in underdevelopment. Every Society or Nation has some values and ideas, ways it wants to be and a set of goals and objectives it wants to achieve. These values and ideas are inculcated into the citizens particularly the children by giving them some selected educational experiences in the schools through various channels usually embedded in the curriculum at the various levels of education. Educational experiences which the curriculum consists are means through which every society attempts to shape the behaviour of its citizens particularly the young ones in order to foster the ideals and values of the society. A good quality curriculum will help to transform the citizens and the whole nation thereby achieving her goals, objectives and national aspirations. Nigeria being an agrarian nation has aims and objectives which guide all learning experiences in agricultural education. These aims are derived from the curriculum. Based on this fact, a good quality curriculum is that which is relevant to the needs of the present and future generations. The curriculum could only remain relevant through constant reforms.

The curriculum of every discipline needs to be reformed or overhauled at regular intervals to meet the changing circumstances in the society. All other professions review their curricula and training programmes to enable them function well in the society and transform their national values to meet with global trends. Agricultural education which is more or less life of all professions should not be left out because reforms in Agricultural education are antidotes to poor educational system and gate way to socio-economic Advancement. Educational reform is the dynamics of socio-political, cultural and technological sub-system which often times

modify the environment of education. Education without reform would render education stagnant, retrogressive and primitive (Nwadiani, 2007). A well reformed curriculum has a clear vision of what it is trying to achieve, it has clear aims that reflect the national aims for education and learners needs as individuals and citizens.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century world is undergoing these rapid changes, there is an urgency for new education needs. Many, if not all the countries of the world are somehow faced with a series of common educational issues and challenges. The existing curriculum seems not to be appropriate or adequate for the needs of a modern society, which wants to create opportunities for competition and efficiency in both management and production. A major defect in the existing curriculum is that, there is no proper linkage between theory and practice in the curriculum. Curriculum theory proponents are therefore faced with the challenges of finding and delivering solution through curriculum development, changes which are perceived as the spice of life. Enduring and good reforms are changes in positive direction as well as signals of advancement of an educational system.

Reforming and renewing the curriculum give rise to innovations in the curriculum, and such innovations when systematically and strategically planned and implemented, lead to progress and dynamic achievements in educational Pursuit. Updating the curriculum to enable it meet the demands of the changing society as well as societal needs and aspirations is one of the fundamental reasons for curriculum reform. Agricultural education will be baseless if not predicated on a sound philosophy. This is because agricultural education built on a sound philosophy can serve as a tool for sustainable development.

### **Constraints to the Actualization of Agricultural Education Vision for Self Reliance and Economic Development**

Education and skill acquisition are defined as everything that is required to raise productivity of the people. On that note, improving the education standard through reforms and innovations become the key to the development of any nation.

The self-reliance policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria is to make the country strong, viable and self sustaining in the provision of the basic needs of life for its citizenry, but unfortunately, the present curriculum lacks the needed training in practical skills needed to move the nation to the level of self sustenance.

The Nigerian education system is characterized by the following practices which impair the dream of Nigeria as a self-reliant nation. These impediments include:

1. Students are led by the examination syllabus. The aim of going to school is not only to pass exam and acquire certificate, but to acquire skills and abilities to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. In Nigeria today paper qualification is one of the societal value systems.
2. The general mode of lesson delivery is by chalk and talk methods at almost all the levels of agricultural education. This does not work well in the present era of globalization. The practical aspect of agricultural education is suffering.
3. Most textbooks used in schools today do not contain current information about the importance of learning by doing or putting theory into practice.
4. Most classrooms and laboratories in Nigerian schools are grossly ill equipped with modern teaching facilities,

5. Cognitive assessment of the students is the most widely used mode of evaluation. The psychomotor and affective learning outcomes are not properly reflected in the report books of students.

### Conclusion

This article has been able to establish the fact that the current emerging trends such as globalization, rapid advancement of technologies call for reforms and innovation in agricultural education in this rapidly changing agricultural environment. The formulation and implementation of good agricultural education curriculum that will equip its citizens with knowledge and skills will help them contribute positively in the actualization of the dream of Nigeria to be a self reliant nation.

### Recommendations

The following are suggested by the writer of this article for Agricultural Education to make Nigeria an economically great and prosperous nation and enable it reach the vision of self reliance and Sustainable Economic Growth.

1. Agricultural education should be made compulsory beyond primary and secondary levels.
2. The curriculum for agricultural education should regularly be overhauled to give room for the acquisition of more practical skills and to meet with global standards.
3. Teachers should be trained on how to use the various methods of teaching that are suitable for agriculture and also see the need to evaluate the affective and psychomotor domains of learning especially through the use of resource-based learning where learners are allowed to use a wide array of print, non-print, new media and human resources to assist students to learn. This will help students develop practical skills that

will help them face the world of work in the future.

4. Support from government and other agencies should be encouraged in the areas of provision of funds and facilities for practical work in agriculture, this will help foster learning by doing.

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