

REAPPRAISING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR FUNCTIONALITY AND SELF RELIANCE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This paper tries to reappraise Agricultural Education as a discipline with reference to the philosophy and goals laid down in the National Policy on Education for functionality and self-reliance. Agricultural science is as old as the history of education in Nigeria. Vocational agricultural programme is specifically designed to provide knowledge and practical skills in areas of agriculture such as Crop production, Animal husbandry, Soil science, Horticulture, Fisheries, Forestry and Wild life; Agricultural economics and Extension, Agricultural education, Agricultural engineering, Agricultural marketing, Agricultural financing etc. The knowledge and practical skills acquired can be used to provide not only self-employment, but to be employers of labour in the long run. Agricultural education is faced with certain challenges or constraints which stops or retards the achievement of the set objectives. Some of these constraints are: Lack of credit facilities, limited facilities, inadequate funds, corruption, and diversion of equipment and unwholesome practices of fertilizer distribution, high teacher-students ratio. Continuous dependence on others for food, shelter, income, employment are some of the effects of neglecting Agricultural education. If the government intensifies her efforts through providing adequate funds for agricultural education programmes and monitoring the way the funds are being utilized, providing adequate functional facilities etc lots of practical skills will be imparted; hence more viability and self-reliance. Government should provide adequate funds, functional equipment/facilities and loan-facilities to credible farmers with low interest rate and for a reasonable duration. The Government should also monitor the way inputs like seeds and fertilizers are being shared. Students going for students' Industrial Experience Scheme

(SIWES) should be encouraged by helping them get attached to recognized establishments for the programme and by paying them the token (money) meant for them.

Introduction

Agricultural science is not a new thing in Nigeria, it is as old as the history of education in Nigeria.

Agriculture has so many branches like Animal science, Agricultural economics, Agricultural extension, Agricultural marketing, Agronomy, Soil science, Plant science, Agricultural engineering etc; hence harvesting, processing, marketing, industrialization etc. are aspects of Agricultural science.

Periodic food shortage is experienced in Nigeria as a developing country. Most of the farmers are peasant farmers with little or no skills on the modern techniques of production due to illiteracy and lack of the modern implement. The resultant effect is limited food supply for the growing population.

Ezeh (1999) defined Agricultural Education as a systematic instruction and training programme for the acquisition of farming knowledge and abilities, skills and mental powers as a strategy for increased agricultural production and other related services in the field of agriculture. The essence of Agricultural Education is to produce manpower for the Agricultural sector by focusing attention on a segment of the nation's population that is amenable to training, employment and development. Agricultural education as a vocational course prepares and equip students with skills that increase their chances of finding jobs after schooling.

It equips the students and farmers with the knowledge and skills they need to create their own employment. It gives technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural,

commercial and economic development and imparts the necessary skills to individuals who would be self-reliant economically. Vocational education is the systematic learning experiences which are designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in recognized occupations as semi-skilled or sub-professional workers or technicians (Osuala, 1989). It provides the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are required for employment in specific occupations (Osuala, 1995).

In Nigeria, vocational education programmes are offered at technical colleges, while the polytechnics offer vocational and some technical education courses at the ordinary National Diploma level. As part of the improved fortunes of vocational education, the current National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998) has accorded a section on it, clarifying objectives with respect to the entire educational system. Further more, a country's increasing unemployment has help to highlight the need for Agricultural education. Both the Federal and State Government and some Non-Governmental bodies operate various types of vocational and technical schools/colleges (National planning commission and UNICEF, Nigeria, 2001).

Concept of Agricultural Education

Phipps (1980) views Agricultural education as the acquisition of organized educational programme that is directly related to the preparation of individual who made up their minds to follow a specific method of trade and would like further training in Agriculture so as to fit into farming and be self reliant.

Agricultural education is majorly the principles, acquisition of required knowledge and essential skills involved in the production of livestock, crops as well as means of processing and marketing of the products. Youdeowei *et al* (1986) sees Agricultural education as the inculcation of instruction and knowledge in the

various aspect of Agriculture so as to enhance the realization of the following objectives:-

- * The supply of plant and animals for human consumption.
- * The provision of raw materials for industries
- * The provision of Agricultural goods for foreign exchange earning
- * Provision of employment
- * Course for studies in institutions of learning

Nigeria is a country noted for her great potentials for Agricultural production, she is blessed with vast arable land and about 60 percent of her adult population are engaged in Agricultural production (Njoku, 2004).

When Nigeria got her independence in 1960, Agriculture remained the mainstay of the country's economy; contributing 67 percent of the GDP until the year 2000, then the GDP declined to 40 percent.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development (1985), noted that agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economic development; some of its functions include: those of providing adequate food for an increasing population, supplying adequate raw materials to the industrial sector, constituting the major source of employment and foreign exchange earnings and providing a market for the products of the industrial sector.

Philosophy

The Philosophy of NCE Agricultural Education programme is tied with the National Philosophy for Self –Reliance based on the provision of teachers endowed with a balanced approach between principles and practice of Agriculture for academic and vocational ends (NCCE, 2008).

Self-Employment Areas of Vocational Agriculture

According to Ijere (1985), unemployment is among the greatest plagues of Nigerian society and it is therefore not surprising

that one of the efforts of government is the provision of educational training for her citizens to be able to face the world of work.

Training in vocational agriculture in a college of Education should be seen as a design by government to equip youths with specific knowledge and skills so as to be able to employ themselves on graduation.

Vocational Agricultural programme is specifically designed to provide knowledge and practical skills in areas of Agriculture such as Crop production, Animal husbandry, Soil science, Horticulture, Fishery, Forestry and Wild life; Agricultural Economics and Extension. Other areas include: Agricultural Education, Agricultural Engineering, Agricultural Marketing, Agricultural Financing etc.

A well trained vocational agriculturist who has the interest and commitment can use the knowledge and skills acquired in any of the above subject areas to provide not only self-employment but can, on the long run be an employer of labour in the under mentioned fields.

The Goals of Technical and Vocational Education

The goals as spelt out by FRN (2004) are:

1. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

The goals of vocational education derived from the central tenets of democracy and from a common, deep

appreciation of the value and dignity of work according to Osuala (1995) are:

1. To prepare a learner for entry into employment and advancement in his chosen career.
2. To meet the manpower need of the society.
3. To increase the option available to students.
4. To serve as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning.
5. Enable the learner to wisely select a career.

The Constraints of Agricultural Education

Agricultural Education in Nigeria is still fraught with problems despite the good intentions of successive Nigerian Governments. Some of the constraints include:

- i. **Lack of credit facilities:** Most economic policies and programmes initiated during successive administrations did not achieve much desired results. According to Adelere (2008), the establishment of Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) whose vision is to be the most self-sustaining Development Finance Institution in Africa is supposed to have catapulted agricultural sector to higher height. Even though the Bank has about 201 branches nation-wide, we are yet to feel the impact in terms of required assistance to farmers and research centres. Despite the decentralization of the Bank's operation across the federation at the Zonal and State level, only 12 of the 36 States including FCT have taken the advantage of the Bank's lending schemes for different agricultural programmes.

- ii. Limited facilities in agricultural institutes:** The continuous decay of facilities in some agricultural institutes across the country calls for a spirited effort in order to redress this ugly situation. Most institutions of learning do not have functional tractors and other machines. Against the backdrop of limited facilities in agricultural institutes, Williams (2008) reported planned intervention by “Action aid Hunger-free” Campaign to raise one million naira as part of her contributions to the sector.
- iii. Inadequate funds for agricultural programme:** Inadequate funding of Agricultural programmes has been a major set-back for somany decades. Njoku (2004) observed that many vital agricultural projects could not achieve their goals as a result of lack of funds. Similarly, Egbehenyo (2005) reported that shortage of fund is really a bugbear in the realization of agricultural goals in the country.
- iv. Corruption:** Corruption is a vice that has permeated every aspect of our national life, thus denting our image nationally and internationally. Ogunbayo (2009) reported the investigation of eight indicted governors who served between 1999 and 2004. The website of EFCC and ICPC are inundated daily with reported cases of our past and present corrupt leaders who siphoned funds. Several billions of naira laundered by these corrupt leaders could have been used to develop our agricultural sector.
- v. Diversion of equipment and unwholesome practices of fertilizer distribution:** Insincerity of several government functionaries poses another core challenge in this sector; hence equipment and fertilizers do to not get to the real farmers. The manner in which fertilizer is being handled is lamentable (Ityokura,2008). The commodity meant for the genuine users has been made deliberately unavailable. Government officials do hijacked the commodity and later sale it out at exorbitant rates to maximize profit. Most of the senior government functionaries involved in mechanized farming gather more fertilizers, government procured tractors and other equipment for commercial farming in their homes; not making it available to farmers. The unavailability of improved seedlings as well as the lack of herbicides are also some of the constraints of the sector.
- vi. High teacher-students ratio:** There is always a high teacher-students ratio during field practical work, which is higher than the 1:20 teacher-students ratio as recommended by FRN (2004); hence students are not fully equipped practically before graduation in order to be self-reliant.

Effects of Neglecting Agricultural Education in Nigeria

- Continuous dependence of some people on others for food, shelter, income, employment etc.
- It makes parents/government to waste money on the so-called general education.

- More and more school leavers (graduates) shall be seen roaming the streets lacking what to do.
- The aims/objectives of the National Policy on Education can never be achieved.

Conclusion

Inadequate funding and siphoning of inputs away from the reach of genuine farmers has to a large extent limit the actualization of the goals; hence more agriculturists are forced to be dependent on others for shelter, income, employment etc. Only few can be self-reliant, except the government comes in to remedy the situation by providing the necessary funds, facilities and inputs.

Recommendations

The goals/objectives of Agric education as stated in the National Policy on Education can be achieved if the following recommendations are taken into cognizance:

1. The government should provide adequate funds for agricultural programmes and the way the funds are used should be monitored.
2. The government should help in providing more adequate functional equipment/facilities to agricultural institutes for better skill acquisition.
3. The government should encourage students concerned to go for students' Industrial Experience Scheme (SIWES) by helping them get attached to recognized establishments for the programme and by paying them the token (money) meant for them.
4. Adequate loan - facilities should be given to credible farmers with low interest rate and for a reasonable duration.
5. The government should monitor the way inputs like seeds and fertilizers are being shared.

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