
**PRACTICAL AGRICULTURE: A MEANS TO POVERTY
ERADICATION, SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Practical Agriculture is meant to train people in various aspects of Agriculture as a means for poverty eradication, self-reliance and National Development. The population of Nigeria is rising, we are urbanized, and the demand for food is rising. Nigeria is spending all its money importing food from other parts of the world. Currently, Nigeria is the largest importer of wheat in the world, accounting for about 85 of 90 percent of wheat import from the United States. Nigeria is the world

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largest importer of rice and yet if you go all the way from Sokoto to Bayelsa in the Mangrove area, you can grow rice. This paper examines what Agriculture, poverty eradication, self-reliance, National development. The negative attitude of people especially youths towards practical agriculture, the need for people's involvement in practical agriculture and suggestions were made for re-generating the attitude of our people towards practical agriculture. The paper concludes that, the much desired poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development can be achieved by promoting peoples' attitude to practical agriculture.

Agriculture accounts for 40 percent of the GDP and over 70 percent of all the employments in the country. But when you look at it, a lot of people that are actually engaged in Agriculture are poor, so you have 70 percent of your population engaged in a sector but they are poor.

Agriculture occupies a unique position in the nation's economic growth and development. According to Shonekan (1997), as cited by Adewoye (2005), agricultural production dominates economic activities in Nigeria which accounts for over a third of the country's Gross domestic product. Agriculture provides food, employment opportunities, raw materials for agro-related industries and foreign exchange.

Aribisala (1983), as cited by Adewoye (2005), noted that 75% of Nigeria's population are dependant either directly or indirectly on Agriculture for their livelihood. The challenge to increase the quality and quantity of food for the citizenry and provision of raw materials for the industries have made successive governments in this country to initiate and establish different forms of agricultural programmes and projects, such as Farm Settlement Schemes, Marketing Boards, National Accelerated food production programme, Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) and so on.

Every agricultural system that grows does so because it has a functioning extension system. Nigeria does not have a functional extension system. She has an extension to farmer ratio of one extension worker to 15,000 to 20,000 farmers. So the extension system in this country has collapsed. As a result the farmers are not aware of new developments in practical agriculture. She had the Agricultural Development Project, ADP, funded by the World Bank. Once the World Bank funding ended that was the end of ADP in Nigeria. Functional extension system fast-tracks practical agriculture,

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demonstrations and give farmers information that will allow them to know what matters and when, that will guide them on how to meet the needs of the market.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept like words means different things to different people. Since most concepts generally lack universal theories, and because of such limitations, they are used and interpreted in different ways by different analysts and scholars. Therefore there is need to have penetrating analysis so as to grasp their innate meanings and relationship with the theme of the conference.

The concept to be examined in this paper include: Agriculture, Re-generate, Poverty Eradication, Self-Reliance, and National Development.

Agriculture

The term Agriculture, is derived from two Latin words: “ager”, meaning field, and “cultura”, meaning cultivation. By this statement, agriculture means field cultivation. However, this is not a complete definition of agriculture since agriculture also has to do with animal production. Iwena (2002) defined agriculture as the production of crops and animals for man’s use. In other words, agriculture is defined as the deliberate effort made by man to till the soil, cultivate crops and rear animals for food and other purposes. It also involves the sale of produce from agriculture because production is not complete until the produce gets to the final consumer.

The Concept of Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is a social malaise which is precipitated by the incapacity of a state to carry out its functions and the unresponsiveness of the government to the economic and social conditions of the people. Poverty has been defined variously by various specialists. For example, Dewit (2000), defined it as a terrible living condition in which one cannot afford the basic things of life such as good feeding, accommodation and clothing.

Furthermore, Abraham (2002) also defined poverty as a pathetic life situation in which a person lives from hands to mouth, and as a result either finds it difficult to eat three square meals a day or eats whatever is available to him. In Nigeria where about 30% of the population lives on less than one US Dollar a day is an issue for concern. This is because poverty can do a great damage to the development of a viable workforce which has often been considered as a great asset to nation building and a sustainable economic development in any country.

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Other African countries whose citizens also live on below one US Dollar per day include; South Africa 23.7%, Botswana 34.7%, Lesotho 50.4%, Zambia 84.6%, Niger 61.5%, Ghana 40%, Mali 52%, North African countries tend to do better in relation to the incidence of poverty. Some of the countries whose population lives below one US Dollar a day include Egypt 7.6%, Algeria 1.6% and Tunisia 3.9% (UNESCO, 2000).

From all the various definitions advanced above, it could be deduced that poverty is a pathetic socio-economic situation in which a person finds it difficult to acquire the essential things of life that can keep body and soul together. By extension, poverty could be viewed as inability to fulfill economic and social life aspirations and ambitions.

Self-Reliance

Self-reliance concerns the ability to do or decide things by oneself rather than depending on other people for help. It carries the notion of independence and self-sufficiency which is a state of not requiring any outside aid, support, or (in extreme cases) interaction for survival. It is therefore a type of extreme personal or collective (group-based) autonomy. Self-reliance also connotes self-direction which is the ability to propel oneself toward a particular direction.

Concept of National Development

A large community of people sharing common language, culture, history and a common constitution and government is known as a nation. On the other hand, advancement to maturity, social wellbeing, dynamic economic policies, military, scientific and technological breakthrough are described as development.

Aghenta (1998) reported that development is associated with modernization, material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress, and the emergence of nuclear energy, electricity and biological revolution, new knowledge about man and universe. It means urbanization, socio-cultural transformation, mass literacy, vertical and horizontal mobility, employment opportunities and the emergence of specialized and independent occupational roles. The ultimate aim of national development must be to bring about sustained Improvement in the wellbeing of the individual and bestow benefits to all. Development is all about self-reliance in every aspect of national life. As the citizen must be involved in the exploitation of the national and natural resources, it becomes necessary to develop the individual to be in a position to develop the society in which he lives.

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Acquisition of specialized skills by individuals helps them develop the society. The major factor responsible for the wide gap in the level of development between the so called developed and the developing nations is the level of development of pure and applied science in these nations. A country can be self sufficient only if it can tap its natural resources and produce finished goods for her basic needs. Therefore, for any nation to develop, she must embrace the development of its indigenous science and technology.

Aghenta (1998) confirmed this when he stated that Nigeria is a producer of predominately primary products. Her minerals are not sufficiently tapped by her citizens because of shortage of capital as a result of primitive method of processing. She is externally indebted, importing expensive consumer and capital goods including agricultural products; her labour productivity is low, whereas capital cost of production is very high. She is poor, which affects investment in needed capital goods; the personal incomes of the citizens is low while the masses are near subsistence living hence, their propensity to spend rather than to save and she has a large difference between required employment and available labour.

Attitude of People towards Practical Agriculture

The youths in the various higher institutions today have negative attitude toward practical agriculture. The reason being that most of them are from rural farming families having detailed knowledge of traditional agriculture gained from their parents. Most of them have this view that their parents are only practicing skills inherited from their forefathers. Oguntowo (1992), as cited by Muibi (2005), noted that, agricultural science students have strong belief that the agriculture presented by the teacher appears not to be significantly different from the one being practiced by their parents.

This is due to the fact that, most of the time, the various institutions still depend on these students for the use of traditional tools and planting materials brought by the students. As a result, the students quickly conclude that the institutions with all its supposed amenities and resource persons have nothing more to offer them.

Students of Agriculture fear the agricultural science teachers rather than respect them especially at the secondary school level where agricultural science teacher doubles as the labour master most of the time. They view the agricultural science teachers as being less educated than the other teachers because of the wrong assumption that one does not really need any special education to cultivate the soil or raise animals. Adewoye (1993), as cited by Muibi (2005), observed with great concern that agriculture

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has remained unattractive to young people in Nigeria because it is still being practiced under the primitive method which is very labourious and untidy.

The Need for Youths' Involvement in Practical Agriculture

'Practical', which is the art of learning by doing makes learning more permanent. The need to imbibe the value of dignity of labour by the Nigerian Youth must not be handled with levity in order to prepare him/her for an all round development so as to be able to face the challenges of the future. The Youths need to be adequately involved in practical agriculture to enable them acquire the necessary skills and knowledge that will make them to have good choice of future career after school. This will give them the opportunity to choose between paid jobs and self employment. It therefore, becomes imperative to involve the youths in practical agriculture in order to achieve the following objectives: To

- (a) Inculcate in the youths the concept of "learning by doing".
- (b) Prepare the youths for the world of work.
- (c) Equip the youths with adequate knowledge and skills so as to establish and manage their own farms effectively.
- (d) Familiarize our youths with essential elements of practical agriculture through direct involvement in production.

Re-generating Practical Agriculture for Self-Reliance, Poverty Eradication and National Development

As it is well known, agriculture today needs a lot of capital. Farm tools and machinery which are needed for large scale production are not within the reach of the youths because of their high cost. Labour which must be rewarded in cash is also needed to carry out the various farm operations. The youths would require large sums of money to procure various farm inputs such as improved planting materials, good breeds of livestock, fertilizers, chemicals, poultry equipment etc. The youths found in Agricultural institutions are from poor families; hence they cannot afford the capital needed after acquiring the skills in agriculture. It therefore becomes necessary as a matter of urgency for all stakeholders in agriculture to come to the aid of these youths financially. The various levels of governments and non-governmental agencies should make available agricultural loans with low interest and long term of repayment available to these youths so that they can establish their own farms after graduation. If the youths know that such offer is awaiting them after graduation they will show more commitment and dedication to practical aspects of their training. Other farm inputs such as fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides and other agro-chemicals, cages, etc should be given to the youths at subsidized rates rather than giving these inputs to older farmers who usually end up reselling these farm inputs to other poorer farmers. These inputs should also be given

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without delay. Undue protocols should be avoided in making loans and inputs available to these youths.

For decades in Nigeria, the federal government had subsidized fertilizer, stocking and distributing it. But rather than that system delivering fertilizers to farmers, it delivers it to politicians and enriched some people. Only 11% of farmers got fertilizers distributed through that system, largely described as inefficient and corrupt, a system that bred poverty. Ironically, while the expenditure of government on fertilizer was rising, the poverty in our rural areas was rising at the same time, an indication that the farmers were not getting the fertilizer.

For the youths to be properly involved in practical agriculture, appropriate training facilities and conducive learning environment must as a matter of necessity be made available. The institutions meant for the training of youths in Agriculture must not divert the funds meant for agricultural practical to other areas. The students will be more interested in practical when they know that all the modern facilities and good environment are available for them.

Efforts should also be made by every tier of government to design, plan and implement programmes that will encourage and stimulate the youths to stay in their various localities instead of moving to urban areas where land is not often available for large scale agricultural production.

Labour saving methods of farming that will enhance the performance of students in practical agriculture should always be adopted in the various institutions of agriculture. In this way, student's attitude toward agriculture generally will be improved.

Special bursary awards should be given to students of agriculture in tertiary institutions by the various levels of government, non-governmental agencies, established farms and even individuals. This will not only boost the moral of agricultural students, it will also encourage students who may be thinking of going into other disciplines to change their minds and take up agriculture as a vocation.

Students should be allowed to enjoy part of the produce from their practical classes irrespective of the cost of production. This will encourage them and make them more interested in the practical classes.

Moreover, programmes meant for improving the economic situations of our youths should be based on the result obtained from systematic evaluation of the agricultural activities of the youths. In this way more youths, especially those in

agricultural training will improve their attitudes and behaviours towards practical agriculture.

Conclusion

Promoting the attitudes of the youths towards practical agriculture will not only make them contribute their own quota to the national development but also make them to be self-reliant thereby improving their own means of livelihood. It is imperative therefore, that all stakeholders in the training of agricultural students should pay more attention to the improvement of students' attitude towards practical agriculture.

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