

VISION AND MISSION OF PRIVATIZING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

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Abstract

Agricultural education is a formal programme of instruction systematically organized for in-school learners and established farmers who are willing and ready to be prepared for careers in agriculture (Umoh, 2002). With this goal, it is expected that the agricultural sector of the economy should be devoid of poor performance and productivity. Regrettably, the contrary is what is on the ground. This could be attributed to fundamental problems such as poor funding, administrative and organizational problems, lack of training facilities, and poor conditions of service, among others. The result of this is over dependence of agricultural education programme on government allocation, which adversely affects the public treasury. The vision/mission of the paper therefore is to privatize agricultural education programme in the 21st century. This will contribute to high performance and productivity of the agricultural sector of the economy. In the process, sustainable economic growth and agricultural development would be stimulated.

Introduction

Agricultural education, according to Umoh (2002), is a normal programme of instruction systematically organized for in-school learners and established farmers who are willing and ready to be prepared for careers in agriculture. In the same vein, Ononamadu (2003) points out that it equips those who need it and want to benefit from it, with saleable skills to enable them fit into the world of work. Recipients of this type of education are therefore equipped with skills and knowledge that make them economically stable and self reliant in the society.

Agriculture in terms of scope is not only farming but also a business and a sound agricultural education programme trains the individual for a profitable business in farming. Hence, Olaitan (1984) posits that the farmer must, in addition to being a good herdsman or crop producer, be able to buy and sell on the most favourable terms, manage labour efficiently, and be able to organize his farm so that production costs are as low as possible.

Putting in place a good agricultural education to re-orientate our people towards effective and efficient methods of production of food is therefore imperative, especially now that Nigeria is branded a consumer nation, importer of finished goods and a nation that gives preference to anything foreign, including food (Ononamadu, 2003). This is an indication that the agricultural sector of the economy's performance is poor or below expectation due to inadequate agricultural education.

The above situation could be attributed to fundamental problems such as poor funding of agricultural education programmes, inadequate competent agriculture teachers, administrative and organizational problems, inadequate training facilities, poor conditions of service and a host of other problems. According to Dzukogi in Adah and Ameh (2004), the numerous agricultural education programmes constitute a drain on public funds, which would have been directed towards other developmental programmes. Thus, rather than being organ for national development, it contributes to the nations under development.

As a result of the above, the paper is of the strong view that agricultural education programmes be privatized in the 21st century to enhance high performance and productivity of the agricultural sector of the economy. Supporting this position, Smith in Ekwue & Sabo (2003) advocates for private ownership of the nation's economic resources and factors of production as a way of reducing waste and maximizing the value of assets. In the process, sustainable economic growth and agricultural development would be stimulated.

The Concept of Privatization

Human events of immense benefit or value are usually owned privately, publicly or jointly. Zayard (1992) defines privatization as the transfer of government owned share holding of designated enterprise to private shareholders, comprising individuals and corporate bodies. Tahir (2003) broadly

looks at it as an umbrella term to describe a variety of policies which encourage competition and emphasize the role of market forces in place of statutory restrictions and monopoly powers. That is to say the ownership of the enterprise be it a firm, company, industry or institution is in the hand of an individual or individuals.

To Ali (2003), privatization connotes ownership of an agency or institution by individual (*s*) who controls and manages the affairs of the agency or institution. When government sells off majority or all its rights, in an agency, that agency is said to be privatized even though it may be the case that it is the same government that regulates through policies, monitoring and evaluation of the private agency. He however reveals that it is seldom the case that any government will lead to monopolize all aspects of policy as well as the operations, control and management of an agency or institution to private persons. Comprehensively, he defines privatization as total or part but over-riding ownership, control and management of an agency or institution by a private person, an individual, community, age-grade, etc. without controlling power by government interference or commitment. Jaji (2003) looks at it as a global phenomenon, which is basically the transfer of state owned investment (including agricultural education services) to the private sector through sales or other means. World Bank (1998) defines it as the transfer of productive assets from state to private investors through such methods as auctions, stock offers, stock distributions, negotiated sales, management employee buyouts and voucher or coupon exchanges.

From the fore going, privatization is also a term used to describe a variety of policies designed and geared towards the transfer, totally or partially, the ownership of public enterprises to the private sector with the aim of achieving optimum and goal oriented performance

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The Concept of Agricultural Education

Agricultural education is designed to lay a solid and sound foundation for vocational agriculture. Amadi (2004) describes vocational agricultural education as the type of education proposed to train individuals to acquire relevant occupational skills, which will make them productive farmers.

Udo (1997:34) looks at it in terms of:

- i. The training designed to advance agricultural science teachers general proficiency in vocational agriculture;
- ii. Training or retraining which is given in agricultural education department of post - secondary schools under public supervision and control; and
- iii. Provision of systematic learning experience which are designed to equip the student teachers with skills, competencies, abilities, techniques, attitudes, knowledge and meaningful practical training required for use in vocational agriculture.

Agricultural education emphasizes the interaction/relationship between education and production work in addition to enabling the beneficiaries to become useful to themselves and to the society. Hence, Umoh (2002), points out that in a well organized programme of agricultural education, a citizenship education programme, a consumer education programme, a special education programme for the handicapped, an applied education programme, a preparatory programme for students entering schools of agriculture; and teacher education for agriculturally related occupations are often provided.

Agricultural education could also be seen as the type of education aimed at enhancing agricultural production and overall human improvement through improved methods and techniques. This could be achieved through formal institutions such as colleges and universities and extension education services. •

State of Agricultural Teacher Education Programmes in Nigeria

In an increasingly competitive world, education is the most powerful instrument for developing and empowering the citizens to master their social and natural environments, and to compete for survival (Jaji, 2004). It is the major tool for generating, stimulating and transmitting the expected value system to all citizens and for establishing a cultural identity. For the purposes of this paper, education encompasses both formal and non-formal learning, particularly, the acquisition of agricultural education and its consequent efficient application that stands to place Nigeria on the path of becoming a developed nation in terms of agricultural development and economic prosperity.

Although it is obvious that education is very vital in the quest for national development, Nigeria's agricultural education programme is currently experiencing a deep crisis. According to Jaji

(2003) only about one-half of school age children are in school at all levels and that majority of our institutions still lack teachers and basic infrastructure such as buildings, teaching aids, equipment, textbooks and furniture. In addition, there are also problems such as unattractive conditions of service for teachers and supporting staff, overcrowding/increased students enrolment, poor quality of teaching and poor quality of products, poor funding, administrative and organizational problems and absolute discrimination, negligence and bias against agricultural education by the Nigerian society (Umoh 2002). Worst of all, corruption, disruption of calendar, cultism and banditry are prevalent in our raining institutions.

From the foregoing, it is very clear that Nigeria's agricultural education is in a poor shape. (2003), laments that budgetary allocations to education in Nigeria, which stood at about 11 percent, 12 percent, 15 percent, for 1996, 1997 and 1998-respectively, of the federal government budget fell below what obtains in many developing countries and is certainly below what is needed to make any meaningful impact on this sector. Again, these fall short of the UNESCO's prescribed minimum of 26 percent of the national budget.

The Rationale for Privatizing Agricultural Education in Nigeria

Privatization of agricultural education in Nigeria stands to reap for the nation, great and immense benefits. This is because Dzukogi in Adah & Amch (2004), argues that private sector is superior to public sector in terms of managerial and operational efficiency. Thus, transferring the ownership of public enterprises to the private sector, would set them on the course of efficiency and excellent performance (hereby stimulating sustainable economic growth and agricultural development).

Okwor (2003) believes that privatization is a remedy for ills of over centralization inherent in public sector system like the schools management boards. These boards are charged with the bureaucratic duties of control, regulation, inspection, supervision and general smooth functioning of the system. Regrettably, they operate at a distance from the local school sites, pupil/student needs, and the learning conditions. Friedman in Okwor (2003), points out that privatization is therefore an attempt to reverse the process so that control by consumers replaces control by producers and averts the possibility of exploitation and alienation in the education sector.

By privatization, the management of schools is brought very close to the consumers of education, especially the local communities within which the schools may be located. Again, schools would be made more responsive, competitive and entrepreneurial so as to bring about improved and enhanced performance and efficiency. Okwor (2003) thus posits that privatization decentralizes controls away from large governmental bureaucracies and places them on the families and communities housing the schools, teachers, principals and parents.

Implications for Privatizing Agricultural Education

Privatizing agricultural education would stimulate economic growth and increased

Agricultural production through (In: various raining institutions in the process. The financial burden of public sector agricultural education will be minimized or eliminated. Government will be greatly relieved in this regard.

When agricultural education becomes privatized, the orientation that "government property/business is no man's property/business" would shift as the private owners of the programme would definitely not accommodate such a negative position characterized by large scale embezzlement and waste of funds. The private investors to the programme would thoroughly supervise and control it to ensure efficiency and good results.

Above all, the agricultural education training institutions would be expanded appropriately in terms of provision of infrastructure, textbooks, laboratories/workshops, standard farms (both crops and livestock), competent staff and creation of overall conducive teaching/learning environment.

Recommendations

In order to achieve high performance and productivity of the agricultural sector of the economy via agricultural education programme, the following recommendations should be implemented and sustained ahead of and during privatization exercise respectively:

- i) Government should as a matter of priority provide the requisite congenial environment required by would-be participants and interested investors, ii) The required infrastructures such as buildings, furniture, laboratories/workshops,

libraries as well as equipment/tools and instructional materials should be put in place. iii) Enough personnel for the programme should be well trained in various qualified institutions by both government and the private sector. In addition, arrangements for regular seminars and workshops/conferences should also be put in place.

iv) Government should be resolute in protecting the programme by setting up result-oriented monitoring machinery to ensure the success and sustenance of the programme. Government should therefore be ready to exercise appropriate authority on any erring proprietor/staff or person without fear or favour. Where necessary, government should not even hesitate to close down schools, especially those that fail to conform to government guidelines and the needs of the society.

v) Funding problem of the programme should be properly addressed. Adequately, both the government and private sector including donor agencies and philanthropists could embrace it.

Conclusion

The paper has pointed out that for years, agricultural education has suffered in terms of funding, infrastructure, facilities and quality, among others. In the light of this scenario, privatization option of agricultural education is encouraged in the 21st century. This will ensure the realization of economic growth and agricultural development. Since the gains seem to outweigh the demerits, all the stakeholders of agricultural education should resolutely embrace privatization for the benefit of all.

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