

TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Ekerete Udo Etok; Idongesit Asikpo, and Thompson Udoh

Abstract

This paper examined the relevance of agricultural education in achieving self-reliance and national development in Nigeria against the background of increasing unemployment rate among school leavers and the resultant negative effects on the national economy. Consequently the authors looked at the agricultural transformation in Nigeria the concepts of self-reliance and development and agricultural education, self-reliance opportunities in agricultural education that will benefits youths and adults, reasons for reluctant of youths and adults to engage in agricultural occupations in Nigeria. Appropriate recommendations aimed at improving agricultural education for self-reliance were made.

One of the national goals of education at all levels, which is linked to the philosophy of Nigeria education is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of this society Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). It may not be wrong, therefore, to assume that every level of education in the country should be geared towards self-reliance and employment.

Agriculture involves the cultivation of land, raising and rearing of animals for the purpose of production of food for man, feed for animals and raw materials for industries. The role of agriculture in transforming both the social and economic framework of an economy cannot be overemphasized. It is also essential for the expansion of employment opportunity, reduction of poverty, improvement of income distribution, industrialization and easing the pressure of balance of payments. In effect, it has been the main source of gainful employment and a reliable source of government revenue. About 80 percent of the total population is engaged in agricultural employment in Nigeria.

Agriculture is seen by Omoruyi Orhue, Akerobo and Aghimien (2004) as the production of crops and animals for man's use, and that agricultural production involves series of activities beginning with the cultivation of the land for the growing of crops and rearing of animals as well as the marketing of the farm commodities. To them, agriculture is a broad based enterprise or industry which has many component businesses.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (2004) noted that agriculture is the mainstay of Nigeria economy with many assigned roles to perform in the course of the country's economic development. Among the roles ascribed to the agricultural sector and those of providing adequate food for an increasing population supplying adequate raw materials to the industrial sector constituting the major sources of employment and foreign exchange, earning and providing a market for the products of the industrial sector. These important role necessitate adequate education in agriculture it can gainfully engage the teeming employed populace.

Meaning of Transformation, Self Reliance and Development

Transformation, according to Macmillan English Dictionary, is a change that is intended to correct a situation that is wrong or unfair, or make a system work more effectively.

In agriculture different transformations and programmes have been embarked upon by federal and states government towards increasing and improving agricultural production. Such transformations are the land use Act of Nigeria. The federal government in 1978 promulgated an Act known as the land use decree of 1978. The decree was set up to address problems of infighting between individuals and communities on land matters, excessive fragmentation of land holdings due to inheritance, lack of security to land ownership such as certificate of occupancy, difficulties in

acquiring land by government and corporate bodies for developmental purposes as well as monopoly of land by few advantage individuals.

The decree is aimed at encouraging a proper and efficient utilization of land for better productivity in agriculture. Specifically the objectives are:

- To assert and preserve by law the rights of every Nigerian to land in the country.
- To create incentives for development by making land easily available to government and individuals.
- To rationalize land use in order to facilitates rapid economic and social transformation in Nigeria. (Land Use Act, 1978).

The decree vested authority over public lands on the state government. All land acquisitions therefore have to be made through the state government and have to be covered by a certificate of occupancy (C of O), duly signed by the state governor.

Self-reliance according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English is the act of deciding what to do by yourself, without depending on the help or advice of other people. In the realm of vocational and technical education, self-reliance concerns using one's acquired skills to achieve self employment in order to ensure economic survival in a depressed economy like that of Nigeria. Additionally, it is the wish of the present administration in Nigeria that every graduate should be self reliant rather than moving from one government ministry/parastatal or the other seeking for nonexistent jobs. This is the reason why the subject matter of self-reliance runs like a golden thread through the various objectives of any educational dispensation in Nigeria, and which is why aids to self-reliance like: entrepreneurship and leadership skills acquisition are being approved and embedded in the various programmes of vocational education in the country.

In this vein, self-reliance is of two folds that would encourage economic survival and development. The first one is national self-reliance as an entity, which will cut across economic, social and political perspectives. While the second aspect concerns the individuals as a self-reliance person. When a nation is self-reliance, it means that all her resources including human and materials are fully utilized in such a way as to producing a favourable gross national product (GNP). Both of them are needed in a country like Nigeria. Likewise, Nwaokolo (2005) is in support of this when he explained with a rosy gross national product (GNP) and hopefully a favourable balance of payment and a healthy income per capital, Nigeria is on the road self-reliance especially resources are properly harnessed and exploited.

Additional, when the youths and adults are not properly trained vocationally or technically so as to be capable of producing goods and service in accordance with the demand and supply of the society, self-reliance would become elusive and difficult to achieve. This is why no individual or nation can attain self-reliance without productivity.

Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organization and discipline. Without these three, all resources remain latent and untapped. There is no doubt that the most vital resources or asset of a nation are the people. Consequently, the progress and development of a nation depends on the levels of resourcefulness of her people which also is a reflection of the quality of training and purposeful development of education in that nation. This can be achieved through effective adoption and implementation of vocational agriculture i.e. agricultural education. According to Egbule (2004), the best legacy to give a child is to teach him how to plough the land and the worst punishment you can give him is to deny him any knowledge of agriculture.

The Basic Concept of Agricultural Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in recognition of the importance of agricultural in the national economy, introduced pre-vocational agriculture in the junior secondary curriculum in order to equip the young students with the necessary pre-vocational or entry into agricultural occupations.

The broad objectives of the curriculum include:

- To stimulate students interests in agriculture
- To assist students acquire and integrate basic knowledge and skills in agriculture
- To expose students to the various occupational opportunities available in the field of agriculture

Towards Transformation of Agricultural Education in Nigeria for Self-Reliance and Development

➤ To prepare students for occupation and for further studies in agriculture. (National Policy on Education, 2014).

Egbule (2004) defined agricultural education as the type of education that is employed in training learners in the process of agricultural productivity, as well as in the techniques for the teaching of agriculture. Presently agricultural education in Nigeria takes place at the informal levels. At the informal level learners are trained to modern agricultural production processes outside the formal school system. At the formal level, agriculture is studied at various levels in the Nigeria educational system.

Agricultural education is concerned with that aspect of learning that prepares people and personnel to become teachers of agriculture extension and other professionals in areas that requires a broad knowledge of agriculture. Among other things focuses on the development of leadership skills needed in planning and achieving long range goals and objectives, including improved agricultural production, conservation of natural and human sources and provision of education programmes for personal family and community development.

In Nigeria, it is not surprising to find that most of our universities offer agriculture as a field of study. This trend is however not complemented by a commensurate number of students. For instance, of the over 60% of the agriculture labour force that are women, only 25% of these women studied agriculture. A survey among the students found the most cited reasons to be personal. The view of their teachers however contrasted sharply with the position of the students. The teachers opined that students studied agriculture simply to have a degree and rarely practiced farming (Afonja and Omolara 1995).

To meet the challenges of agricultural production and food security facing Africa today and in the 21st century countries must be willing to invest in their human capital for development improving human capital in agriculture is especially important in the low income food deficit countries of Africa where the shortage of trained human resources is a major limiting factor to development.

Self Reliance Opportunities of Agricultural Education

Ijere (2005) noted that unemployment is among the greatest plagues of Nigeria 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 institutions of learning 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 agriculture programme is designed to provide knowledge and practical skill in areas of agriculture such as crop production, animal husbandry, soil science, horticulture, agricultural economics and extension, fishery, forestry and wildlife. Other areas include agricultural engineering, agricultural extension etc.

According to Aghimine and Ojo (2001) a well trained vocational agriculturist who has the zeal and commitment can use the knowledge and skills acquired in any of the above subject areas to provide not only self-reliance but can on the long run be an employer of labour in the following fields.

➤ **Crop production:** Food crop like rice, maize, guinea corn, bean, yam, groundnut and cassava can be embarked upon by graduate of vocational agriculture. These crops have a short production cycle which makes it possible to produce them at least two times a year under natural rainfall. These crops are also of great demand throughout the year as they form the staple food of many Nigerians. Huge capital outlay is not required before one can go into the production of these crops.

➤ **Production of vegetable crops:** Gainful self employment skills can be undertaken in the production of vegetable crops such as tomatoes, pepper, amaranthus, fluted pumpkin, cabbage, lettuce and others are of great demand everyday for different purposes, another advantage of vegetable production is that production can be carried out throughout the year especially with the adoption of simple irrigation procedure with good production plan; a vegetable producer can generate income all year round.

➤ **Livestock production:** especially pigs and poultry, somebody who chooses to engage in the production of poultry birds such as fowls, turkey, duck and guinea fowls either for eggs or meat and also pigs, will be fully occupied throughout the year which also guarantee income at regular intervals. Moreover, these enterprises can be undertaken with little and small space of land. In some cases, already built poultry or pig houses can be rented for a fee. After few years of steady growth, these

projects are capable of employing not only the livestock keeper, but other persons in order to cope with husbandry and other activities so as to meet consumers and market demands for products. Other livestock which could be reared include; sheep, goat and cattle but they require huge capital outlay which a beginner may be unable to provide and large expanse of land which is not easy for a young graduate to provide.

➤ **Fish production:** as a part of an integrated farming approach, a graduate of vocational agriculture involved in poultry production can be more gainfully employed through the rearing of fishes in ponds and/or tanks. Fishes such as catfish and tilapia can utilize waste food materials for good thereby reducing cost of feeding to low minimum. Moreover, fishes are of high demand to market with no discrimination of any kind. More importantly, that ponds can be constructed within a living environment is enough encouragement to persons who wish to be engaged in fish production as means of substances.

➤ **Establishment of horticultural gardens:** The establishment of flower gardens where different flowers species are raised for sale to individuals, corporate organizations for beautification of compounds and living environments is becoming a very good source of self employment. A specialist that operates horticultural gardens can also be involved in landscaping of compounds for private individuals in the raising of seedlings such as those of oil palms which are of great demand. The establishment of horticultural garden does not require heavy capital outlay.

➤ **Agricultural products processing:** This is another area of agriculture that is capable of generating good employment for young school leavers. This include the processing of ripped oil palm fruits and palm kernel, processing of cassava into garri and starch, processing of rice, timber logs and others with little capital, local processing plant can be fabricated and installed for farm products processing business that will yield regular income.

Reasons for Reluctance of Youths and Adult to Engage in Agricultural Occupations in Nigeria

Inspite of the benefits of gainful employment and self reliance posture which agricultural education possesses a lot of primary, secondary and tertiary education graduates have a great reluctance to engage in the practice of agricultural occupations.

Ugiagbe (2007) identified the following reasons for youths and adults not engaging in agricultural occupations.

➤ **Ownership/fragmentation of farm land:** The land ownership system in many communities is very complicated especially when it is vested in the hands of family heads and other leaders. In this way land becomes fragmented or divided into family lands with first born children inheriting large positions leaving very little or none for the growing youths. This makes them to travel to urban or sub urban centres for alternative jobs to farming.

➤ **Attractive urban life:** Many youths and adults have found urban living very attractive to live in and would want to work in them. Attractive in the sense those urban centres have electricity supply, health care delivery systems, pipe borne water supply, schools, hotel services, television and radio network etc. Therefore they see many agriculture occupations designed for poor and undedicated peoples in the society.

➤ **Superstitious beliefs:** Many youths and adult population, especially in the rural areas still have superstitious beliefs about the existence of witch crafts than have super natural powers over the control of low or high yield of crops including their influence over their Templeton's or failures in life striving. This belief makes them to migrate from such an areas to other areas where they are not known as an escape from such powers.

➤ **Lack of interest/desires to study agriculture education in schools:** Many youths nowadays do not possess the innate desires and interest to study various agricultural programmes in tertiary institutions. Many of them who find themselves in school studying agriculture are there as an avenue to avoid the huddles of admission required to other courses. This is aside their agricultural education still and pursue other ventures that are at variance to their trades or professions. Hence the agricultural sector is still dominated by unskilled people in rural sub urban and urban areas. In this view the much required transforming of farming practices in Nigeria is very low.

➤ **Concentration of federal government revenue in the oil exploration to the detriment of small scale entrepreneurial services:** The federal government of Nigeria is collaborating with foreign oil and gas companies have been spending huge sums of money into the oil resources base

Towards Transformation of Agricultural Education in Nigeria for Self-Reliance and Development

exploration in the Niger-Delta region. The result is that the region has become a bastardized environment with incessant oil-spillages, pipe line vandalization, fire-outrages, oil bunkering etc. The oil spillage alone has polluted the rivers, creeks, farm lands, natural fish ponds and has exceedingly affected the fossils, while gas flaring has polluted the atmosphere of the area. In this regard, the inhabitants have been robbed of their various agricultural occupations provided by nature, and have become unemployed.

➤ **Differences between average income in modern economic living and traditional agricultural sector:** A lot of graduates see traditional agricultural occupation as those that do not encourage get rich quick value system of modern Nigeria youths and adults. This value system has made them to seek employment in government ministries, parastatals, banks, oil companies etc. even though many of them lack specialized or professional talents. Hence, the traditional agricultural practice has been gradually abandoned. This is the reason why old uneducated people are the ones that are still engaged in the traditional agricultural production.

Conclusion

No doubt agriculture being the mainstay of Nigerian economy cannot be properly enhanced without the adoption and implementation of appropriate agricultural transformation and programmes that are suitable to the Nigeria environment. The paper has highlighted the areas of the self-reliance that will create gainful employment to many youths and adults. Therefore the federal government should ensure that transformation in agriculture should be strictly followed by the availability of people who are willing to embrace agricultural education. This would be feasible if necessary machinery is put in place to ensure the interest of youths and adults (both males and females) in agriculture.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, it is here recommended as follows:

- Re-introduction of farm settlement scheme in rural areas with the provision of social areas with the provision of social amenities such as pipe borne water, electricity, road network, this will not only boost agricultural production but encourage youths to stay in rural communities.
- The existing agricultural training institutions should be well equipped with the necessary and modern tools, equipment, improved seeds, chemicals and different livestock species and breed to expose students to practical agriculture.
- Incentives should be given to deserving students who have excelled in skills display so that more students should feel more committed to the subject.
- Agricultural education programmes should be made compulsory at all levels of the nation's education system. Tertiary institutions students in faculties/schools other than agriculture can be made to study agriculture as a general studies programme, so that on graduation, such students will be equipped with at least the rudiments of modern agriculture such students could go into either full time or part time farming in future.
- There should be consistency in government agricultural policies.
- Policy makers must develop the political will to support investment into research and extension to ensure development of appropriate technologies for farmers. Investment into research should not be viewed as waste, as there can never be any development without research.

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