

TOWARDS PRIVATIZING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE

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Abstract

The fact that the aim of all extension work is to teach rural people how to raise their standard of living with minimum assistance from government, and by their own efforts, using their own resources cannot be over-stressed. With this broad aim of extension, it is expected that the agricultural sector of the economy should be devoid of low performance and productivity. Regrettably, the contrary is what is on the ground. This could be attributed to fundamental problems such as bureaucratic red tape, blatant corruption, and mismanagement, among others. The outcome of this is heavy or overdependence of extension education programme on government financial allocation which drains the public treasury. For purposes of economic rehabilitation and reliance, the paper is of the opinion that extension education is privatized as this will give a new lease of hope to the agricultural sector of the economy. Sustainable economic growth and development would be stimulated in the process.

Introduction

Agricultural extension education in Nigeria has been characterized by full scale government financial involvement as well as it's overall management. This has been the status right from the colonial pre-independence days when the country operated the lugardian extension system (LES) and the college extension system (CES) which were established during lord Lugard's colonial administration of Nigeria and the post independence administration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria respectively (Olayide & Ogunfiditimi, 1980). Several research institutes were equally established to complement the extension education system. In the 1970's agricultural development projects (ADPs) were established in many states. Equally, successive governments flagged off different programmes under different names, all aimed at complementing extension efforts for the purpose of enhancing agricultural productivity.

The above extension systems and organizations were booming at their initial stages of establishment because of some reasonable levels of their funding by governments that owned them. Today, most of these agricultural extension systems are bedeviled by some fundamental problems such as bureaucratic red tape, blatant corruption and a host of other problems. According to Dzukogi (2003,) they constitute a drain on public funds, which would have been directed towards other developmental programmes. Thus, rather than being vehicles for national development, they in most cases function in reverse direction. Ajayi in Dzukogi (2003.) opined that our parastatals (including extension education based) are institutions of public disservice rather than service.

As a result of the above expressed inefficiencies coupled with the present economic downturn in the country, government initiated a reform of public enterprises called privatization. For purpose of economic rehabilitation and reliance, the paper is of the strong opinion that extension education services be privatized. In line with 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. He further argues that if public assets were privatized, the owners would have the incentive and initiative to monitor activities, eliminate waste and maximize the Value. **The Concept of Privatization**

The term privatization according to Dzukogi (2003) can be defined as the transfer of ownership baton of public enterprises (fully or n^{tially}) to the private entrepreneurs. Raymond in Ekwue & Sabo (2003) defines it as the transfer of funds from the private sector to the public sector in connection with the purchase of the enterprise and transfer of productive facilities from the public sector to the private sector. Ekwue & Sabo (2003.) also see it as a reward system involving a move towards the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness in the attainment of objectives, through the adoption of management styles that take profit-making as one of its major goals. To Ida (2001) privatization may mean any of the following;

- a) A change of ownership from public to private hands.
- b) The transfer of management from public to private hands.
- c) The opening or breaking of a public monopoly power by allowing competition by private

- producers or operators
- d) Not privatization at the enterprise level but privatizing the economy i.e. creating the environment for the private sector to serve as the prime engine of growth and development.

He observes that public enterprise are privatized just to break up a monopoly position so that the ensuring competition gives the consumer better options than in the monopoly.

In analytical terms Alfred in Iweh (2003), observes that privatization covers the transfer from the public to the private sector the ownership, and/or control of productive assets, their allocation and price and the entitlement to the residual profit flows generated by them. It is a situation in which decision on what, how and for whom to produce are determined by market forces through private sector as opposed to government policy. World Bank (1998) defines privatization as the transfer of productive assets from state to private investors through such method as auctions, stock offers, stock distributions, negotiated sales, management-employee buyouts and voucher or coupon exchanges.

From the foregoing, privatization is also defined as any policy change that widens the scope of private business outlay to compete with government business outlays or one that may cause public firm to act or behave like private firms that are known with optimum and goal oriented performance.

The Concept of Agricultural Extension Education

Agricultural development process studies have proved that education is one of the prominent factors for attaining economic rehabilitation and reliance, growth and human progress. According to Williams, Fenley & Williams (1984), extension education is regarded as one of such-wide educational inputs designed for farmers to help them help themselves. They define extension education as a voluntary out of school educational programme for adults consisting of relevant content derived from researches in the physical, biological and social sciences synthesized into a body of concepts, principles and procedures.

Adams (1984) points out that agricultural extension encompasses advice and assistance for farmers to help them improve their methods of production and marketing. He however advises that agricultural extension should not be seen only in the context of part of the effort to achieve a balanced social and economic development of rural areas. This according to him is necessary in order to maintain the increase in productive capacity.

Obibuaku (1983:14) defines it as an informal out-of school system of education designed to help rural people to satisfy their needs, interests, and desires. It is a system of education which involves adult learners. The essence of extension work according to him is that as an educational process it involves the following:

- a) Working with rural people along the lines of their immediate and felt needs and interests which frequently involves making a living, enhancing their level of living and improving their physical surrounding.
- b) Conducting worthwhile and acceptable activities in the spirit of co-operation and mutual respect between the extension worker and the rural people.
- c) Utilizing supporting activities to bring extension work and extension staff up-to-date through use of subject-matter specialists, resource persons, in-service training, conference and the like.
- d) Utilizing certain techniques in attaining the educational objectives of extension.

It is indeed an educational process geared towards bringing about change in the behaviour and thinking of people. For instance, changing the thinking of farmers that poor yields from their farms are as a result of curses from the gods or the malevolence of enemies to due to depleted soil and that they only need to replenish the soil by fertilizer or manure application.

In a nutshell, extension education is all about educating the farmer and the entire rural people on the modern and improved strategies of farming, processing, marketing of agricultural products and overall

improvement of life.

Brief Appraisal of Public Extension

While "modern" extension has existed since the nineteenth century, agricultural extension is quite young worldwide as a formal institution, with the majority of countries including Nigeria initiating such services since the 1950s and 1960s (Rivera & Gary, 1997). They further revealed that 50 per cent of agricultural extension organizations had been established or were reorganized in the previous two decades.

Following the above scenario, governments (including both Nigerian federal and state) in recent times have discovered that continuous provision of all services previously rendered by them are becoming cumbersome. Governments have been or become slow to increase finances meant for publicly funded activities, the reasons been the raising costs, limited available resources, bureaucratic red tapism, blatant corruption, general mismanagement and changes in the prevailing philosophy of the adequate level of government intervention. As a result of the prevailing economic downturn, some functions of government have been reduced to the barest minimum and others have been privatized.

Again, it is a fact that extension all over the world has blown the governments recurrent costs of extension to very significant magnitude. Hence, Swanson, Farner & Bahal (1990) reported that there were approximately 600,000 agricultural extension personnel worldwide, with 95 per cent of these working in public agricultural extension systems. Many of these personnel do not show the desired commitment to work thereby causing wasteful spending on wages to the detriment of high productivity.

The large numbers of extension staff in Nigeria; is a reflection of low unit cost and this translate into huge government outlays. As a result of this, Howell in Rivera & Gary (1997) reports that many countries have examined alternative structural arrangements, including the feasibility of reducing public sector extension expenditures (with associated staff reductions), changes in tax raising, charges for government extension services, and commercialization and privatization. Nigeria should therefore follow suit in a bid for her to improve her extension situation or services. This is necessary more so that a league of countries is moving towards reducing, recovering or shifting the huge burden of the costs associated with provision of public sector agricultural extension.

The Rationale for Privatizing Agricultural Extension Education in Nigeria

Privatization of agricultural extension education in Nigeria stands to reap great and much dividends for the country if implemented. This is because Dzukogi (2003) argues that private sector is superior to public sector in terms of managerial and operational efficiency; thus, transferring the ownership of public enterprises (Ijke the various state owned extension organizations) to the private sector, would set them on the course of efficiency and excellent performance thereby stimulating the desired economic rehabilitation and reliance. Ekwue & Sabo (2003), assert that the need to privatize government enterprises like state owned extension organizations came as a result of high level of corruption in the handling of government affairs and the unpatriotic and counter productive regard of public property as no man's property. They further point out that the whole economic sector of Nigeria ranging from agriculture and a host of others has suffered neglect continuously due to the corrupt nature of the individuals handling the affairs of such establishment and if allowed to continue the whole sector will sooner or later collapse completely. With this setback, they advised that Nigerians should understand privatization as essentially a part of a restructuring every facets of the nation's economy towards an era of growth that would positively contribute to raising the standard of living of the average Nigerian.

Another rationale is the need to realign Nigerian extension with the unfolding global trend, which reveals a shift from state controlled extension organizations and service to an extension organization driven or managed by the private sector. This according to Dzukogi (op. cit) explains the reason for a socialist economy like China privatized state owned enterprises.

Implications of Privatizing Agricultural Extension

Privatizing agricultural extension would ensure sustainable economic rehabilitation and reliance as well as increased agricultural production via extension organizations in the process The fiscal burden of public extension will be reduced or eliminated as the case may be. Governments will be relieved of fiscal

transfer from national appropriation to cover the inefficiencies of the extension firms.

Again, the nation's deficit account arising as a result of public extension will be reduced by ending costly subsidies. Equally, privatizing extension would reduce wastes and increase efficiency as resources are better managed as a result of employment of highly qualified persons.

Since qualified and committed persons will manage extension, more investors will be interested in investing in the country's extension firms and as a result gainful employment for many Nigerians will be provided.

In a nutshell, generally, a more commercialized approach broadens the focus of extension personnel and makes an extension service more responsive to client needs and changing economic and social conditions (Rivera & Gary, 1997). Other immediate implications of privatization include:

- i) The tendency toward reduction of linkages both among organizations and among farmers in the exchange of agricultural and other relevant information;
- ii) The tendency to enhance large-scale farm enterprise to the detriment of small-scale farming; iii) The diminishing emphasis on public good information and the advancement of knowledge as a saleable commodity; and
- iv) The trend towards agricultural development services that cater primarily to large-scale farming.

Conclusion

The paper has so far highlighted that the present public extension arrangements in the country have performed so low due to factors such as inefficiency, corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks and general mismanagement. In the light of these, it has been advocated that the country's agricultural extension be privatized to ensure economic rehabilitation, growth and reliance. Since the gains of privatization outweigh its demerits, all the stakeholders of agricultural extension in the country should vigorously embrace privatization for the benefit of all.

However the following recommendations should be implemented and sustained ahead of and during privatization respectively:

- i) The government should provide the requisite congenial atmosphere needed by intending participants and investors. ii) To cater for small scale farming, government should give adequate credit to farmers with a view to making them large scale. With this in place, small-scale farming will reduce. iii) A privatization-monitoring unit comprising government and private individuals of Godfearing disposition should be put in place to effectively implement and supervise the exercise. Any erring party should be appropriately dealt with.
- iv) Apart from giving adequate credit to smallholders to expand their farming enterprises, government should also extend enough volume of credit to the masses through the proposed privatization-monitoring unit to enable them participate actively in the programme. According to Dzukogi (2003), this is in view of the fact that the success of any privatization programme would be determined by the extent to which the masses have been able to participate and benefit directly from it.
- v) The government should continue to sustain the public good information through the ongoing globalization of information technology.

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