

REPOSITIONING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The repositioning of Agricultural education in Nigeria educational institutions was examined. The contribution of agriculture before and after the advent of oil boom, with theoretical exposition of agricultural education and its objectives were also examined. The problems of Agricultural education at the secondary, tertiary and at the community levels were also dealt with. Recommendations, which included mandatory establishment of school farms as well as a well, defined agricultural laboratories both at private and public secondary schools were made. Others include a well-structured curriculum emphasizing both theoretical and practical skills and the training of farmers on modern technical aids, materials and techniques to ensure profitability were recommended. In order to achieve the above, it was 'also recommended that tertiary institutions be focused and well funded to undertake viable researches.

Introduction

Agriculture has been the cornerstone of the nation up till the late fifties when oil was discovered and even today, it contributes 42% to the Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) against oil's total contribution of 11%. Despite the fact that oil is still responsible for 95% of revenue generated by the government, the economy is based on what contributes to the GDP, to which Agriculture is the major contributor (Abdullahi, 2005).

Theoretically, most countries could actually feed themselves. All they require is to re-orientate their broad policies, allocate more funds towards agricultural development, support applied agricultural research, apply more inputs and teach producers to work to technical and marketing standards which would make their efforts more profitable. The overall objective of all Agricultural development efforts in Nigeria is to achieve self-sufficiency in food production and to improve the income and standard of living of the majority of the population who are farmers.

Producers of such products as cocoa, coffee, ginger, cotton and groundnut have witnessed substantial, and in some cases multiple increases in prices. It has once again become remunerative to engage in agriculture (Aig'Imoukhuede, 1988).

Meaning of Agricultural Education

Agricultural education is the acquisition of skills and knowledge in Agricultural Science with the view to imparting these knowledge and skills into prospective farmers for better productivity (Agbulu and Ekele, 2004). It is a vital developmental process, which is directly related to the effectiveness of the economy in providing the requirement of trained man power (Olaitan, 1989).

The strategy for this development relies on the intensive utilization of well trained individuals, particularly at the intermediate level. Food is one of the most important political issues of our time, and must be raised to the top of our political agenda in the country. (Onucheyo, 1998).

Objectives of Agricultural Education

The main objectives of Agricultural education include:

1. To provide young people with sound knowledge of the basic principles and techniques of agriculture and the motivation with which they can translate this knowledge into real improvements in Agricultural productivity.
2. To preserve those aspects of culture which are in line with modern farming methods, while changing those, which are obsolete with regards to taking consideration, the importance of tradition and customs within the rural community.
3. To provide the farmer with the knowledge upon which to base his production decisions.

4. To help the rural farmers develop an understanding of the inter-relationships of urban and rural life.
5. To provide counseling on agriculture/agricultural occupations and the means of preparing for them.
6. To provide training for specialist in Agricultural occupations, such as livestock, horticulture, food storage and processing as well as insurance and financing.
7. To produce adequate trained personnel involved in extension services for farmers, translating research findings into field trials and then into commercial application.

To achieve the above listed objectives, there is need to reposition Agricultural education at secondary school level, tertiary level and at the community level, as the future development of Nigeria depends essentially on the education (Sylvester, 2005).

Problem Statement

Today, farming is a business, involving many scientific practices which has become highly organized, specialized and mechanized. Production management and marketing problems are becoming more complex and competition between farmers increases each year.

One of the most important problems in developing countries is the level of awareness and importance attached to development. The problem is compounded because of the relatively weak institutional framework for promoting development of Agricultural sector. In order to be successful, the farmer must be able to assess problem situations quickly and make rational decisions. This is achieved with the help of professional teachers and/or extension staff along with creating appropriate training resources which is achieved through repositioning Agricultural education for a country determined to make rapid progress in Agricultural development.

Agricultural Education at the Secondary Level

At the secondary school level, we agree that Agriculture is being taught as a subject but the teaching is based mostly in theory only. Very little emphasis is placed on the practical aspect as most secondary schools do not even have school farms or a well-defined Agricultural laboratory. The syllabus or its implementation emphasizes the theoretical aspects neglecting the practical aspect, which is responsible for acquiring the necessary skills.

This approach does not encourage youths to take up farming as a career upon leaving school and as such encourage rural-urban migration thereby creating unfavourable attitudes towards farming.

Agricultural Education at the Tertiary Level

At the tertiary level where there are faculties or departments of Agriculture, these schools are not mission-oriented and therefore cannot practically solve the problems. Even with the **establishment of Agricultural** tertiary institutions which are supposed to find solutions to the problems of Agriculture through extension services by translating the result of research into the language of the rural farmers (Idachaba, 2005), graduates of such institutions do not even practice the profession.

The research institutes of the tertiary institutions no longer carryout research work due to poor funding (Abdullahi, 2005).

Agricultural Education at the Community Level

Agricultural education at the community level is simply referred to as agricultural extension concerned with the assignments/disseminating of useful and practical information to farming families in rural areas. This would help the farmers in their efforts to increase agricultural productivity. This useful and practical information cannot be effectively disseminated if there is no communication between extension researcher and the extension agent or between the extension agent and the farmers during the teaching and learning process (**Igunnu J 988**).

Conclusion

Before the advent of oil boom, there has been success in the Agricultural sector, which

contributed to the buoyancy of the economy to a great deal. Although impacts of the neglect of Agricultural sector is being known and felt, but little attention is being given.

To gain back its lost glory and to reduce the in-balance between the output of institutions and the skill requirement of the economy, this paper assumes that Agricultural education can be repositioned in Nigeria, bearing in mind the stated problems and the recommendation made below.

Recommendations

1. The secondary school curriculum should emphasize both on the practical and theoretical aspects of Agriculture. This will help to groom the students not only on the theoretical knowledge but also on the practical skills.
2. School farms and well-defined Agricultural laboratory should be made mandatory in all secondary schools in the country. This is with a view to encouraging practical participation of the students thereby creating a favourable attitude towards Agriculture upon graduation.
3. The research departments of the tertiary institutions should be properly funded to encourage research.
4. The tertiary institutions should have a focus for Agricultural Development.
5. At the community level, farmers should be encouraged and trained on modern agricultural techniques.

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