

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Udeolisa, M. C.

Abstract

The writer briefly examines the concept-Agricultural Education and went further to evaluate its relevance in the society, especially as it concerns the issue of self-sufficiency in food production, manpower development and better rural and community life patterns.

Introduction

The three basic necessities of man have been food, clothing and shelter, but food has always ranked highest among these three basic needs. Also man has always employed all possible avenues of procuring food for himself and his family; for without this primary need life could have come to extinction. Every effort of man is necessarily geared towards food security. This race was begun by the early man, though in the most crude and uncivilized manner, but which today has assumed a modern and technological dimension.

Agriculture as at today, is no longer only a family affair geared towards family sustenance, but a business for profit maximization. Many great nations of the world today, attained their present economic height as a result of absolute material and financial commitment to the agricultural sector. Examples of such countries like, U. S. A., U. S. S. R., Japan, China, Britain have over the decades been at the fore-front of world food production, exporting varieties of agricultural products to different countries of the world.

It is worth mentioning here, that, in Nigeria, there was a period, precisely before the dawn of the civil war, when the economy of the nation depended solely on the agriculture sector. At this time, the nation had more than enough to sustain its citizenry, and the excess exported for foreign exchange. But regrettably, not long after the war, there was a shift to the 'oil boom'; relegating agriculture to the background. This consequently, resulted in massive drift of able young men and women to the urban centers for white-collar jobs and other related employments. Presently, food production is wholly left in the hands of the aged people, with a greater percentage of them uneducated and highly unproductive.

The Nigerian Government realizing the need for sustainable food production has severally come up with policies and programmes geared towards enhanced food production. Among these policies is that of making it compulsory the teaching and learning of Agricultural Science at all primary and secondary school levels.

The Concept-Agricultural Education

Agricultural education as defined by Udeolisa (1977), is 'a branch of agriculture which integrates principles and practices of education in the study of agriculture.' Its primary focus, just like agriculture proper, is no production of food and raw materials for the ultimate benefit of man and to feed our numerous industries.

The World Book Encyclopaedia states that, "agricultural education deals with instruction in agriculture, use to farmers, to those engaged in non-farm agricultural occupations and to all persons as part of their general education. It is "the training of learners in the processes of agricultural production, as well as in the techniques for the teaching of agriculture." Olaitan (1988), defined it as teacher preparation in agricultural production and in pedagogical skills in agricultural subject matter areas'. It therefore takes place at two levels. These are: formal level which takes place at the primary, secondary to graduate study at the tertiary institutions. The informal level goes on outside the formal school setting, which most often may involve useful training given by extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture who work directly with farmers and other farm workers.

Agricultural Education and Sustainable Development

The agricultural sector is the mainstay of the economy of most countries of the world. The sector has gone a long way to ensure food security (both quality and quantity) for the teeming

population of such countries. Therefore, the fact remains that the rate and level of development of any nation is dependent on her level of agricultural development. Also a nation that cannot meet up the basic food needs of her citizenry is politically and economically dead. According to Egbule (2002), this fear can most easily be removed through the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from science and technology into agricultural production.' According to Egbule (2002), agricultural education can contribute towards the realization of self sufficiency in food production and better rural and community life through:

1. providing young people with sound knowledge, skills and creative abilities with which they can translate into real agricultural production;
2. producing more trained personnel involved in extension services for translating research findings into field trials, adaptation and commercialization;
3. providing training for specialist agricultural occupations such as plant and animal breeding, plant and animal pathology, food processing and preservation agricultural financing, insurance and rural sociology;
4. providing farmers with the knowledge and skills for efficiency in production decision making process;
5. equipping students and all agricultural practitioners with the knowledge and facts about Nigeria's agricultural potentials, technology and environment;
6. helping farmers and students appreciate positive values such as good feeding habits, conservation of our natural resources, personal hygiene and maintenance of family life;
7. preparing students for life-long learning in agriculture and related subjects as well as enable them have an intelligent understanding of the problems and opportunities in their communities and environment;
8. developing problem-solving and safety practices on students and other agricultural practitioners.

On the other hand, Udeolisa (1977), maintained that agricultural education could play the following roles as:

1. provision of food and raw materials to the over exploded population;
2. manpower development through training of professionally qualified agricultural science teachers and other technical personnel in agriculture;
3. provision of co-operative occupational education services;
4. foreign exchange earnings
5. income generation;
6. provision of employment opportunities to millions of Nigerians.

Suggestions for Improvement

The Agricultural Education programme of the nation has come to say. This obvious reality is manifested in the geometrical explosion of institutions offering the programme today. The following strategies, if meaningfully adopted, would go a long way towards addressing most of the lapses associated with Agricultural Education programmes at the various schools levels of the nation.

The measures include:

1. Training and posting of more professionally competed teachers to schools.
2. Provision of adequate and serviceable equipment and facilities to schools
3. Adequate and regular funding of the various institutions offering Agricultural Education and other vocational courses.
4. Adequate remuneration of Agricultural Science teachers at various levels of the school system in the way of hazard allowance.
5. Schools should be provided with adequate fertile land to enable students acquire the necessary practical skills in agriculture.
- 6.. Provision of agricultural inputs to schools (fertilizers, insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, planting materials, implements, etc.) and at highly subsidized rates.
7. Seminars and workshops should be occasionally organized for agricultural science teachers so as to be up to date in their respective specially areas.

8. School principals should be encouraged to introduce such viable youth organizations such as the Young farmers' Clubs, Tree Clubs, Crop Clubs, Livestock Clubs, Horticultural Clubs, etc. in the schools.

Conclusion

For sustainable development of our country, especially, in the present dispensation, the issue of food security should be properly addressed by all stakeholders. Agricultural education is one major avenue of achieving this laudable goal. The government, therefore, should evolve better articulated policies that would enhance teaching and learning of agriculture at all levels.

References

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