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## HARNESSING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF FOOD SUFFICIENCY IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria seems to find it difficult to feed her teeming population despite the enormous agricultural and human resources the nation is blessed with. This paper examines the possibility of harnessing Agricultural Education towards the attainment of the objective of food sufficiency in Nigeria. It examines the concept of Agricultural Education, the efforts previous government have made and the application of Agricultural Education toward achieving food sufficiency in Nigeria. The paper outlines strategies for harnessing Agricultural Education toward the attainment of food sufficiency, and discusses the implications of the implementation of these strategies.*

*Keywords: Agricultural Education, Food Sufficiency, Agricultural Production, Harnessing.*

### **Introduction:**

For some times now, Nigeria has been grappling with the problem of feeding her ever teeming population. No fewer than 60million Nigerians go to bed every day on empty stomachs despite the available resources and vast land for agricultural purpose (Amusu, 2015). According to the Author, in spite of the fact that Nigeria has a land area of 91,077sq/mm with 93 percent available for

cultivation, the nation is ranked 80<sup>th</sup> on food security among 105 countries of the world on affordability, availability and quality by the Global Food security index. Oriola, (2009) observed that Nigeria is endowed with 74 million hectares of arable land and 2.5 million hectares being irrigable respectively, yet the country is yet to take comparative advantage of the favourable climatic condition, the large expanse of land and

ever increasing population despite the fact that variety of crops thrive well with maximum yield in different ecological zones of the country, food insufficiency is the order of the day.

Food insufficiency is a major challenge facing Nigeria as an independent nation that cannot feed its citizens cannot be said to be independent. Food insufficiency is the inability of a nation to meet its staple food needs all year round. Food sufficiency will guarantee food security and food security entails producing food that will go round every citizen both in quantity, quality and reserved for everybody's supplies. To achieve this Oriola, (2009) maintains that Agricultural production needs to be enhanced with adequate knowledge of the environment, climatic conditions, the market situation and its operation, types of agricultural chemicals, crop treatment processes, prices and its mechanisms. Oriola noted that an average Nigerian farmer is inadequately informed, that is in terms of low level of formal education and wallowing in abject economic poverty. The low level literacy

and insufficient knowledge of modern techniques in agricultural practices becomes a major impediment to meaningful progress in the Nigeria's agricultural development efforts.

In line with the actualization of the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme economic poverty and hunger, this paper therefore focuses on exploring the possibility of harnessing Agricultural Education towards the attainment of food sufficiency.

Specifically, this paper discusses:

- ❖ The concept of Agricultural Education
- ❖ Food Situation in Nigeria
- ❖ Efforts of Various Governments toward the Attainment of food sufficiency in Nigeria.
- ❖ Strategies for Harnessing Agricultural Education towards the attainment of food sufficiency in Nigeria.
- ❖ Implications of Harnessing Agricultural Education toward food sufficiency in Nigeria
- ❖ Conclusion

## **The concept of Agricultural Education**

Agricultural Education may be defined in various ways. According to Ekong, (2000) Agricultural Education is a technical and professional in and out of school educational programmes designed for technical and pedagogical skills to function in a chosen agricultural or vocational area or enterprise. It is an educational and skill training programmes directed toward the needs of those in schools, those out of schools, as well as adult farmers on agricultural techniques, storage, marketing and distribution of agricultural produce and products.

Agricultural Education is "The Training of learners in the process of agricultural productivity, as well as in the techniques for the teaching of agriculture. It is teacher preparation in agricultural production in pedagogical Skills in agricultural subject areas Olaitan, (2009). Agricultural Education is an in-school agricultural training programme for youths to acquire relevant agricultural occupational skills for effective engagement in any chosen agricultural occupational area (Ekong, 2002). It is therefore the type of education

that is employed in the training of learners in improved agricultural production processes as well as in the techniques for the teaching of agricultural. It therefore takes place at two levels, the formal level which would take place at the primary, secondary to the tertiary level in the university and colleges of education and at the informal level which goes on outside the formal school system. Most often useful training is given by extension workers who work directly with farmers and other farm workers to bring and demonstrate to them crops and animal production processes, techniques and machines.

In school, according to Egbule, (2002) agricultural education refers to the teaching of skills, values, attitudes and related knowledge in production, processing, and marketing of agricultural and related products. In such schools, students are expected to carry on short and long term practical activities and projects such as cultivation of crops, vegetables and fruits, rearing of livestock for the school's, individual and corporate consumption for distribution in the local markets and for

industries as raw materials.

Among other things they learn to undertake improvement projects to increase the value and efficiency of their farms, keep records as well as grade, process and market their produce. At present, agricultural education is studied at various levels in the Nigeria educational system at the basic, post basic at tertiary levels.

### **The Food Situation in Nigeria**

The food situation in Nigeria is growing worse by the day. There seems to be a general decline in the production of local food stuffs because Nigerians particularly, the youths, which constitute a significant proportion of labour for agricultural production have abandoned farming in search of white collar jobs. Food production is left in the hands of aged and local farmers who are often too weak to produce sufficient food for the nation. These farmers are not educated enough in the technicalities relating to modern agricultural production, hence, they are dogmatic and adamant to change, very superstitious in their beliefs, very suspicious of any innovation, unscientific in mind and in thinking and not willing to accept technological

changes. These farmers are very uncooperative, hostile and unaccommodating with extension officers, unwilling to even learn how to use and apply fertilizers, insecticides and new farm tools (Iwena, 2007). All these bring about low agricultural productivity resulting in food shortages in the country. The situation has worsened up to the extent that the Nigerian Government had to resort to food importation to feed her teeming population. Currently Nigeria is importing a greater percentage of the food that is eaten in the country including those ones she has the potentials of producing.

### **Previous Nigeria Government Effort at Achieving Food Sufficiency**

Since independence every administration made efforts to achieve food sufficiency in the country. In the 60s, Nigeria depended on agriculture to provide infrastructure and run services until the collapse of the first republic, and the military take over in 1966. At that time, a lot of seedlings were exported to other countries. For example, palm fruit seedlings were exported to Malaysia. Nigeria also excelled in the production

of cocoa, rubber, groundnut and cotton.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1976 the Government introduced the Operation Feed The Nation programme and the Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank was established to fund agriculture and assist farmers. The objectives of the schemes as stated by the then Head of State at the Launching included among others, the mobilization of the nation towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production. The programme was fashioned to revolutionize the agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy, which was derailing from its normal contribution to the economy. To make the programme effective, farmers most especially in the rural areas were taught farming practices and agriculture was made compulsory in all secondary schools. In addition, eleven River Basin Development Authorities (R.B.D.A) were established to facilitate irrigation agriculture as an attempt to expand farmland. Although the Operation Feed the Nation succeeded to some extent in arousing national consciousness for the growing decline in food production, it failed to encourage increased

agricultural productivity on a more sustainable basis.

Government's effort between 1981 and 1985 yielded good results as the contributions of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose from 21.1% to 35.4%.

This was the result of Green Revolution programme of then Civilian administration in April, 1980 which complemented the River Basin Development Authority Programme.

The Military Administration in 1986 came up with rural infrastructure development programme and established the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). The programme was to open up rural areas for effective agricultural activities and boost food production. The effort raised the contribution of agriculture to 39.9%. The trend changed since 1991 and the contributions have been decreasing, which forced the country to depend more on food importation.

The new democratic government in 1999 introduced so many policies and programmes, re-organizing, restructuring,

privatizing institutions and agencies and brought them in partnership with some others to make more impact. All these had positive impact on agricultural production and consequent improvement in the contributions of agriculture to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Despite all these efforts, not less than 65 percent of Nigerians are insecured food wise (Mohammed 2008).

The Nigerian government came in 2007 with a seven-point agenda, one of which was to transform the agricultural sector. But very little success was recorded as the administration was cut short with the death of the President. Even when the administration's transformational policy on agriculture was continued by the succeeding government up to 2015, not much success was recorded in the area of food production as many Nigerian complained of starvation and hunger.

### **Harnessing of Agricultural Education toward Food Sufficiency in Nigeria.**

The rate and level of development of any nation is a function of its agricultural development. In other words,

food security is important to any nation in dire need of development. This is because a nation that cannot meet the basic food needs in terms of quality and quantity for her populace is politically and economically subservient, unstable and could easily be maneuvered and threatened by more stable nations.

This fear can most easily be overcome through the application of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from science and technology into agricultural production. Also, the need for improvement in the state and condition of rural areas and its inhabitants is great. This is where Agricultural Education comes in.

The suggested way forward could promote the harnessing of agricultural education toward food sufficiency in Nigeria:

1. The government should establish more agricultural training institutions in the country where agriculture is effectively taught to provide young people with sound knowledge, skills and creative abilities with which they can translate into real agricultural production. Such

institutions should operate in collaboration with relevant industries, professional bodies and establishments to ensure practical training and experience. The institutions should be non-formal and private-sector-driven but with public-private partnership.

2. Government should produce more trained personnel involved in extension service for translating research findings into field trials, adaptation and commercialization.
3. Government should through the training institutions provides training for specialist agricultural occupations such as plant and animal breeding, plant and animal pathology, food processing and preservation, agricultural financing and insurance, and rural sociology.
4. Government through effective extension service delivery should provide farmers with the knowledge and skills or efficiency in production decision-making process.
5. Agricultural training institutions should equip students and all agricultural practitioners with the

knowledge and facts about Nigeria's agricultural potentials, technology and environment.

6. Such training institutions should help farmers and students appreciate positive values such as good feeding habits, conservation of natural resources, personal hygiene and maintenance of family life;
7. Prepare students for lifelong 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 and
8. Develop problem-solving and safety practices in students and other agricultural practitioners.

### **Implications of Harnessing Agricultural Education toward Food Sufficiency in Nigeria**

Harnessing agricultural education toward food sufficiency in Nigeria have implications to the extent that, Nigeria as a nation will redouble her effort at



cultivating pockets of technology at all levels of education, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels. More attention will be directed toward practical and productive aspects of education. Agricultural Education will become competency based, skilled and production oriented. Agricultural Education will be removed from the confines of the class rooms and laboratories into farms, gardens, markets, industries and rural communities. More emphasis be laid on exploratory activities, individual and group projects, and industrial work experience. The agricultural extension services be strengthened through, the re-training of the extension workers to re-position and enable them meet-up with the modern challenges of educating the rural farmers.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of agricultural education for food sufficiency and security is concerned with the totality of wellbeing of mankind.

The present youths at the various levels of Nigerian educational system are the future farmers. Consequently, the interest and zeal manifested

by the youths towards agricultural education are significantly related to the achievement of self-food sufficiency aspiration of the nation, now and in the future. Thus, the involvement of the psychomotor, affective and psycho-productive skills of the youths in agriculture can, if properly channeled promote a new era in agricultural education for food sufficiency and security.

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