sustainable Human Resource Development in Agriculture

Mchivga Alexander Abelega, Dr.
SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE

BY

M. A. ABELEGA, Ph.D

Abstract
This paper examines the concept of sustainable human resource development and traces its genesis in Nigeria agriculture from pre-colonial era to the present. It discusses the constraints and strategies for a sustainable human resource development in the 21st century and concludes that Nigeria will succeed as a nation to the extent that she evolves educational options that enhances the potentials of all categories of workers in the sector to increase their choices of what to produce and the quality of their overall well-being.

INTRODUCTION
It is imperative that Nigeria, like other developing agrarian nations of the world, should try desperately to harness the advantages of a sustainable human resource development in agriculture to implement her nation’s plan for socio-economic development. This arduous task cannot be achieved without a determined spadework which requires not only a mental understanding of the concepts but a proper focus in the objectives and strategies for achieving them.

Thus, a balanced view of sustainable human resource development in agriculture will reflect a point of focus which could assist Nigeria to eliminate chronic dependency on foreign commodities and aids and invest heavily in human capital in the field of agriculture to the extent that she will move into the second decade of the 21st century on an equal footing with the industrial countries in terms of agricultural development.

Therefore, this paper examines the concept of “sustainable human resource development” and traces its genesis in Nigerian agriculture from pre-colonial era to the present. It discusses the constraints and strategies for a sustainable human resource development in the 21st century and concludes that Nigeria as a nation, will succeed to the degree that it finds functional educational options in resource development in agriculture that will enable all categories of workers in the sector to increase their choices of not only what they can produce but also their overall well-being as productive workers in the country’s primary sector.

THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE
Human resource development is an elusive concept to comprehend. This is because different people have different parameters for its assessment. For example, some analysts have erroneously perceived human resource development as anti-growth, arguing that it focuses on the distribution rather than generation of income, that it is a social rather than a developmental concern. However, the truth of the matter is different. Human resource development is concerned with both the development of human capabilities as well as the
use of the capabilities more productively. The former requires investments in people while the latter parameter focuses on what the people can and do contribute to the Growth National Products (GNP) and employment. Another controversy about human resource development is one that perceives human resource development as primarily sectoral. That is, perception of human resource development as investments in education, health and other social services.

Again, the writer perceives this conception of human resource development as incorrect. Development of people along these ends is certainly vital, but it is only one part of the picture. Human resource development involves development for people including the creation of economic opportunities for all. It means development by people requiring participatory approaches.

Human resource development is, therefore, a comprehensive concept, it covers all human choices in all societies at all stages of development. Consequently, the goal of human resource development in agriculture ranges from the most basic ones of human survival through improved production of crops and animals to the most advanced human agenda of enhanced application of science and technology in agriculture. This paper perceives human resource development in agriculture as encompassing the process of enlarging human choices through the conception and use of opportunities in agriculture.

Therefore, our focus with respect to human resource development should be to further the exploration of human resource development in agriculture by considering the interaction and/or intervention between people and their natural environment. If the objectives of such development in agriculture is to improve people's choices, it must do so not only for the current generation but also for the future generations. In other words, the perceived human resource development must be sustainable.

At present, the major problem militating against human resource development and its sustainability in agriculture, is poverty and sustained commitment towards people's welfare and economic growth. According to United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (1992), Nigeria ranks the 86th poorest nation on the basis of Human Development Index, HDI, after Zaire (85th country) and even less endowed nations like Ghana (77th country) and Cameroon (76th country). Most of the low income farmers live in the rural areas where they overuse their marginal lands for fuelwood and for subsistence and cash crop production. This practice by the poor further endangers their physical environment, their health and lives of their families.

For these communities, government should see no choice between envolving strategies for human resource development that engenders economic growth and environmental protection. Also, the government must perceive ways of enhancing their economic growth or well being as imperative and not an option. The issue is not on how much economic growth that this form of human resource development can bring but what kind of growth. The human resource growth model to be adopted in these areas should, therefore, be models of sustainable development.

In other words, human resource development in those communities must adopt new technologies and comprehensive policies to reduce pressures they put on the carrying capacity of the earth now and in the future generations.
For avoidance of doubts, sustainable human development in agriculture expected in the 21st century Nigeria should give priority to human beings. Environmental development is vital. But (like economic growth) it is a means of promoting human development. For this reason, our primary focus must be to explore educational options that will protect human life and human choices. This implies that longer term viability of the nation's human resource systems in agriculture—including their biodiversity has to be assured.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS TO THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE

The origin of the present problem of human resource development in Nigerian agriculture started with the introduction of the current form of western education. Oranu (1994) reported that before the advent of the western type of education in Nigeria, labour and hardwork were glorified and highly esteemed. At that time, farmers were revered, recognized and given place of honour in their communities. As a result of the respect for labour and hardwork, successful parents were known to anxiously expect and plan for the time they could produce children who could take after them and possibly advance agricultural production beyond their horizon.

However, with the advent of western education, the focus of agricultural education gradually shifted to the production of advisory personnel who could help implement the agricultural circulars of the colonial administrators (Taylor, 1976). According to Taylor (1976), the orientation of western education in agriculture then ushered in preference for sedentary activities as opposed to manual-labour oriented activities. Eze (1990) and Ohuche (1987) reported that the education in agriculture at the time was the bookish-type of western education that neglected practical experiences which were strong points of the undocumented traditional education which the former replaced.

To make the situation worse, the new set of elites produced as a result of this shift in occupational preference used their monthly salaries to show-off and consequently displaced the hardworking farmers (Oranu, 1994). Following the new orientation by the emerging working class, there was a crave for “white collar” jobs and schools were established to guarantee the production of such category of workers. At the same time too, Sofolahan (1987), Ohuche (1987), and Oranu (1994) reported that Nigerians who possessed psycho-productive skills were made to be subservient to personnel of liberal or bookish education as more of “white collar” skills were rewarded.

Nyerere (1967) observed that:

The education provided by the colonial government... was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country, instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of colonial society and to train people for the service of the colonial state... The education was modeled after the British system but with even heavier emphasis on subservient attitudes and on “white collar” skills.

Similarly, Eze (1990) pointed out that the initial direction given to formal education in Nigeria had some crucial role to play in the subsequent disregard for the dignity of labour. In his opinion, if agricultural skills and other skills of value had been encouraged alongside literary education, there could have been a reduction in the current preference for “white collar” jobs.
Judging from the orientation of the colonial curriculum, can we say with certainty that the colonial administrators were interested in providing agricultural learning experiences that could serve the interest of the Nigerian child? Of course, the answer is in the negative! Commentators on agricultural curriculum (Alaezi, 1989; Uwaduae, 1993) believed that the agricultural curriculum in the colonial schools was not aimed at providing experiences in agricultural education programmes that were relevant to the needs of the people of Nigeria. Alaezi (1989) decried the inability of the colonial education programmes to provide educational experiences that could enable graduates to be job creators instead of job seekers but blamed the situation on the conflicting demand for curriculum modification by Nigerians in the colonial era.

According to Alaezi (1989), some Nigerians in the colonial era advocated for a curriculum that would lead to the realization of personal advancement in the European economy while others craved for a curriculum that could lead to mass political consciousness. In each case, he believed that the school curriculum was seen as a process clearly identifiable with the skills of literacy as opposed to the skills of production.

In respect of agriculture, Alaezi (1989) reported that whenever the adoption policy of colonial administration was seen to be biased towards the acquisition of agricultural skills in the schools, the Nigerian parents and the scholars opposed it on grounds that it was calculated to deny the Nigerian youths the possession of necessary academic skills for entry into more prestigious and economically viable European-type economy at the time.

Even after independence of Nigeria, this orientation in the agricultural education programmes persisted, Salmon (1976) reported that many of the agricultural courses offered in agricultural institutions were developed by the pre-independence scholars whose basic thinking was influenced not only by the ideas from the western countries, but also by the experience of the pre-independence times. Upto the 1990s Olaitan (1988), Ogunyemi (1990), Olaitan & Uwadiae (1993) observed that the colonial orientation in agricultural education programmes which was the subject of major attack during the “liberation struggle” in the 1950s was still common in our educational institutions.

Taylor (1976) remarked that the present system of agricultural education has been essentially informed by the patterns and experiences of the countries from which they were imported. According to him, such forms of agricultural education bequeathed to the country by the colonialists have failed to prepare young people to participate fully in the life of their rural communities. Instead, it led them to break away with the environment.

World conference on Agricultural Education and Training, WOCAET, (1970) revealed that many centres of learning in the field of agriculture in the third world (including Nigeria) fashioned their agricultural training programmes after American and British institutions but tended to resist pressures for change in response to the needs around them, with the result that many graduates look at agricultural education programmes as a way of escaping from the life of the country-side, drudgery and poor returns associated with the agricultural sector.

From the above expositions, it could be concluded that the influence of colonial administration on human resource development in Nigerian agriculture has forced the country beyond the limits of doubt, that, to copy the patterns of education and training from a model in another country leads to blind alleys. Interest in agricultural occupations and
employment generation by graduates do not start with copying foreign education and technologies. It starts with creativeness and commitment of the indigenous people - their perception, development and utilization of indigenous education and technologies that are sufficiently adopted to the needs of the society. When the accent of agricultural training and education is copying foreign agricultural models and technologies, all human resources in agriculture of the copying country remain latent potentials and such a society could remain agriculturally underdeveloped and limited in employment opportunities amidst the most opulent natural endowment. On the contrary, when the agricultural education programmes are properly oriented and executed, it could nurture and sustain agricultural development and employment opportunities on the scantiest of natural endowment.

CONSTRAINTS TO HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE.

There are several constraints to human resource development in Nigerian agriculture. A few of the constraints that deserve special mention are:

(k) **Absence of Deliberate Policy on Human Resource Development in Rural Agriculture in the Country**

To date, Nigeria's efforts at agricultural development have been focused on improvement and development of agricultural inputs at the expense of human resource development in the productive sub-sector of agriculture (rural areas). As could be observed, recognized positive efforts towards human resource development in Agriculture have been in the preparation and use of high level and intermediate manpower in Universities, Polytechnics and Monotechnics especially designed to meet the practice of agriculture internationally.

The extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture who appear to be developing the human resources in the rural areas are not only limited by long bureaucratic red tapeism, but are also constrained to operate within the limits of the scarcest material and human resources to implement their mandate. Further, most of the extension personnel are not equipped enough to establish linkages with existing research Institutes in order to enhance the development of rural human resource.

As a consequence, most training problems of the rural farmers who bear the brunt of agricultural production in Nigeria are not visited. It is little wonder, therefore, that Nigerian agriculture production is declining instead of increasing with increased population since independence.

(l) **Gap Between Learning Experiences Provided in Education Programmes and Practice in the Agricultural Industry**

In all segments of human resource development in Nigeria, there are wide gaps between what is studied in such programmes and what is practiced in the agricultural industry. For example, in the high manpower category, Nigerian Universities train their product in the skills and use of mechanized agriculture whereas most of her graduates do not have the opportunity to practice such skills in the society.

Would it not have been better to take a step back and look at the practice of agriculture production in the rural communities with a view to integrating same and consequently improving human resource development in Nigeria’s agricultural institutions?
It is contended that Nigerian Institutions that develop human resources in agriculture should go beyond the modification of agricultural curricular in order to offer different areas of specialization to the provision of practical skills relevant and needed in Nigerian agricultural communities.

(m) **Non-Prioritization of Human Resource Development Objectives**
Worldwide, every country has scaled down her priorities in human resource development. In advanced Countries like USA, Germany and France, priorities are not only set, but targeted datelines are assigned in the projection and are seen to be met. In such Countries too, projections are met through deliberate strategies that are backed up by well-thought-out monitoring procedures that ensure implementation of lay-out plans. However, in Nigeria, most human resource development strategies end up on the drawing boards.

For example, it is clearly stated in the National Policy on Education, NPE, (1981) that Education would be used to guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens. Nevertheless, most Nigerian children that are economically disadvantaged may not see the four walls of good primary school despite the established knowledge that farmers who completed four years of good elementary education increase their agricultural productivity by 8.7% on average (UNDP, 1992) and the current Universal Basic Education Policy.

(n) **Undue Adherence to International Standards**
Human resource development institutions in Nigerian agriculture adhere unduly to International standards. Right from the onset of higher education which sets the pace of human resource development in Nigeria, there has always been the feeling that such education will be no good if it is not of the same standards as obtained in Britain and America. Nigerians, and indeed, most countries in Africa have always looked up to the two countries for academic and consequently human resource development standards. The history of education in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1991) indicates that Universities of Ibadan and Ghana were reluctantly recognized and eventually accepted by Africans only because of their affiliation with the famous London University.

In addition to our pre-occupation for international standards in education, our concept of development is also inextricably linked to the level of industrial countries. From all indications, our development is a matter of accelerating economic growth in order to reach the level of advanced countries as soon as possible. Hence according to Ukilii (1985), we are a “nation in a hurry” striving to “catch up” with advanced nations of the world. Is there any wonder that our efforts at human resource development in agriculture are failing to meet the yearnings and stalk realities of the present?.

**STRATEGIES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE**
As Anyaye (1996) concluded, it is difficult to specify a universally accepted index and consequently strategies for human resource development or quality of life. However, the basic needs, aspirations, goals and values of people in the agricultural sector can be enhanced if the nation would implement the following strategies:

63
i. **Review of the present Human Resource Development Policy on (and Strategies for) the Development of Rural Agriculture**

In a developing Country like Nigeria where majority of the rural population is engaged in agriculture, and where the tempo of development appears to be running against time, there is need and great advantage in the review of current human resource development policy throughout the country. Whatever may be the policy of the individual Government on the development of rural agriculture, it should be tailored to the overall national objective of the agricultural industry in order to enable the human resource development programmes to contribute effectively to national development.

Broadly, the reviewed policy should focus on teaching, research and service to rural farmers. Teaching should provide the rural areas with the cadre of individuals with the required physical and intellectual skills for national development. The acquisition of knowledge and further understanding of the dynamics of the environment should be achieved through research. Service in this context should relate to the transfer of technology developed through research to the users within the community.

ii. **Utilization of Skill - Oriented Admission Criteria for Selection of Freshmen into Agricultural Education Programmes**

Studies (Ikejiani, 1971 and Uwadiae, 1993) showed that the problem of prospective graduates which started at the time of admission continue throughout the training period to the working life. In Nigerian agriculture, one of the problems of prospective graduates which start at the time of admission is poor attitude towards farming.

This attitude towards farming can be eliminated through pre-selection criteria that make it possible to exclude candidates who possess negative traits to farming. Of course, one of the ways of evolving the pre-selection criteria that would exclude those with negative traits towards farming is to adopt selection criteria that are skill-oriented. Much as skill-oriented criteria would vary from one agricultural area to another, a rule-of-thumb statement would be to state that admission officers should sieve and utilize those skills that are commonly expected in the category of the occupational area the candidate is seeking admission into.

iii. **Determination, Development and Transmission of Home-Grown Values that Engendered Respect for the Dignity of Labour and Human Resource Development**

It could be recalled that before the advent of Western Education in Nigeria, labour and hardwork were highly glorified and esteemed. At that time too, farmers were recognized and given a pride of place in their communities. As a result of the respect for labour and hardwork, successful farming parents were known to work hard at transmitting their skills to the younger generations.

At the advent of Western Education, however, these desirable values were replaced with the Western ones that bore no relevance to the needs of the Nigeria people. Therefore, it is imperative that, if Nigeria wants to return to the past position of glory for the dignity of labour, traditional structures that facilitated the emergence and
sustenance of value orientation in the pre-colonial days have to be sought for and integrated into the present forms of education in agriculture.

iv. Increased Exposure to Practical Agriculture
Closely related to the second suggestion is the need to follow up the selection of freshmen with provision of practical skills relevant to agricultural production. The practical skills should start in the second year and should take the students to far-away places on rural farms and research stations where they will work on commercial farms and research oriented psycho-productive skills to acquire the practical knowledge that will enable them operate confidently in the area of their speciality.

Students’ practical exposure should cover all skill-related areas in agriculture production but prospective graduates should spend more time on animal nutrition and land evaluation. The essence of such a training should be to educate and train qualified agricultural experts who remain in the agricultural discipline as self-employed farmers or help farmers to increase their productivity once they are graduated.

v. Introduction of leadership Training in the Agricultural Education Programmes
Employment generation could be engendered through structured agricultural education and leadership training. Leadership training could start in form of inaugurated clubs along the same lines as the 4H Clubs of USA and the defunct Young Farmers’ Clubs.

In these clubs, members should be assisted with inputs and facilities that would enable them adopt modern production techniques in agriculture for the purpose of making agriculture a career.

CONCLUSION
The paper examines the concept of sustainable human resource development and traces its origin in Nigerian agriculture from the pre-colonial period to date. It discusses the constraints and strategies for a sustainable human resource development in Nigeria. It is hoped that the ideas and insights shared in the paper coupled with the strategies and mechanisms to be will positively change the future of human resource development in Nigerian agriculture. If agriculture becomes more effective, more people will opt and find employment in it. No doubt, this will ensure sustainable human resource development in agriculture.

REFERENCES


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