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THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SOCIO-CUTLURAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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By

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**Abstract**

*This paper examined the role of vocational agricultural education in promoting socio-cultural and economic growth in plateau state. The paper anchored on the premise that vocational agricultural education is a medium for transforming the communities in plateau state, with over 70% of its people living in rural areas and actively engaged in agriculture at subsistence level. This study indentified some off farm vocations in agriculture which are capable of uplifting the standard of living of the communities in the state and can attract both youths and adults who misconceived agriculture to only farm work associated with drudgery. Socially, vocational agricultural education provides people all over the world with cultural contact with one another, which leads to acculturation. Economically, vocational agricultural educations have a human resource development strategy which stimulates economic growth and development.*

**Keywords:** vocational agricultural education, socio-cultural and economic growth.

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**Introduction**

Nigeria is just waking up from her slumber to the stark realization of our inadequate food production in relation to our population (Agbulu and Ekele, 2004). The geometric increase in Nigerians population and the arithmetic rise in food production, the drain experienced in our foreign reserve due to massive importation of food, the unprecedented social change especially in our youth's and consumption of foreign culture are worrisome issue in Nigeria and that of plateau state in particular.

Vocational agricultural education is undoubtedly the answer since plateau state is an agrarian society where about 70% of its populace is engaged in agriculture. Most of the agricultural producers are small scale farmers living in rural areas and are responsible for producing the bulk food upon which the state depends. They use traditional methods of food production which do not meet the demand of the fast growing population (Plateau State, 2007). The quantity and to some extent quality of food produced had not kept pace with the ever increasing demand by the populace.

Despite the expansion in the economy of the nation and that of plateau state in particular as a result of the oil boom, agriculture which had become the back bone of the state's economy has not registered any appreciable improvement. According to Agbulu and Wever (2011) vocational agricultural employs about three quarters (3/4) of the Nigerians working population yet the performance of this sector has been on the decline. Nigeria therefore needed an

educational system which would rehabilitate and transform her people into gainful productive citizens. If career and vocational education were sufficiently integrated into the curriculum it would permit the full development of the individuals to enable them harness and channel their potentials into sufficient and productive endeavors. It is therefore, reasonably enough to suggest that vocational agricultural education which encompasses farming and agro-allied business organization including others involved in services and sales in agriculture will definitely promote socio-cultural and economic growth among communities of plateau state, Nigeria. Thus vocational agricultural education brings about actual involvement in farming activities without any undue compromise. This can be done by harnessing the untapped resources and instituting self-reliant, discipline required for endogenous technology driven economic and social change in the society.

Vocational agricultural education in a broad sense is that form of education which specifically prepare an individual to perform in his/her chosen occupation. It is that education which is designed to teach skills, develop aptitudes, attitudes and competencies that are requisite to success in a given occupation. This form of education consist of formal instruction which is purposely designed to develop abilities, attitudes, skills and understandings, that make young people and adults occupationally competent participants (Denga, 2011).

### **Role of vocational agricultural education in promoting social lives of the communities**

It is undoubtedly a common fact, that the role of vocational agricultural education is uncompromising, as it is an integral part of human existence. Similarly of importance is the fact that early man in pre-historic time existed on vocational agricultural education which sprung out from his conscious mind of hunting and gathering, where he later began to learn through instinctive (innate propensities) education to gather fruits, tame animals and later cultivate them for social survival.

However, Jhingan (2000) stated that social upliftment of the lives of people have significant relationship with the availability of basic human needs of food, clothes, shelter and good health. Whereas these basic human needs cannot be accomplished without agriculture playing the major role in the supply of the raw materials to produce these basic needs.

It is worth noting, therefore, that vocational agricultural education is a social as well as an economic investment. This is so because vocational agriculture is a very important source of economic growth as it enhances stock of human capital. Denga, (2011) also reported that efficient vocational agricultural practices is one of the essential ingredients in the social development of most developing countries. Thus vocational agricultural education played a significant role in promoting social status of not only the people of plateau state, but the general well-being of Nigerians especially in pre-and post independence up to the 1970s. With the discovery of mineral resources especially oil in the early 1970s, vocational agriculture was relegated to the back ground (Central Bank 2002).

### **The significance of vocational agricultural education in promoting cultural status of the communities**

In the contemporary Nigerian society, and that of plateau state in particular, the youth are swimming in the ocean of negative values like dishonesty, indiscipline, secret cults, examination malpractices, bribery and corruption, greed, laziness and idleness, drug abuse and alcoholism just to mention, but a few. There is great need to salvage them (youths) from these unethical vices which has plogue the state. Consequently upon provision of sound vocational openings such as crop production, animal husbandry, fisheries and craftsmanship, horticultural landscaping vocations, agricultural marketing, agricultural processing, agricultural mechanization and so on, the youths and adults can be efficiently engaged for a useful living. Youth and adults when expose to vocational agricultural education will be self employed, hence remain

productive citizens. It is believed that each community/society has set rules, laws, regulations and code of conducts guiding the behavior and tone of its people. These laid down standard or traditions are believed to be the tested wisdoms of the ages that provide cultural stability, solidarity, security and promote good relations amongst the members of that community (Jhingan, 2002). These codes of conducts have great influence on the cultural adjustment and behavior of the people.

In a situation where an individual has internalized these cultural ethics and principles of behavior youthful age, he/she does not necessary follows the crowd without deep conviction of the social and cultural rightness of the action being perused (Denga, 2011).

Describing the present cultural situation of today Onov, Shitindi and Abilekaa (2011) said while globalization does not seem to be given us much in terms of technological transfer, industrialization and economic upliftment, it is on the other hand facilitating the transfer of foreign cultural value and lifestyles into Nigerians. It is true that cultures all over the world experience contact with one another, such contacts they added leads to acculturation, which is a process of cultural borrowing or exchange. Unfortunately, the history of cultural contact between the western society and African society is one that leads to forced acculturation which each group imposes its culture on the other group. This is cultural domination.

Vocational agricultural education will inculcate the spirit of workmanship, hardwork and dedication because it provides a vocation for the youths and adults thereby removing all forms of negative acculturation.

### **The role of vocational agricultural education towards promoting economic growth in the communities**

There is a general expectation in every community that each member of the community should discover, develop and direct his/her cognitive, psychomotor and effective energies and interest towards making a positive contribution to the improvement of the economy of himself and the society in which he/she lives. Consequently, a programme of vocational agricultural education is a programme of human resource development out of which emerges not only increased human social satisfaction, but complete stimulation of economic growth and development.

According to Denga (2011), vocational agricultural education aimed at making both youths and adults occupationally competent at any level of education for one reason or the other. The present economic, social and technological changes in Nigeria and

Plateau state in particular, have posed a great challenge to education for occupational competence (vocational agricultural education). It is worth noting that one of the characteristics of rural communities in plateau state is that there is numerous opportunities especially in vocational agriculture that can help youths and adults to identify and take advantage of these great economic opportunities instead of drifting to towns and cities in search of white collar-jobs.

Similarly of importance, Torsar, Milk and Ter-Rumun (2009) observed that there has been huge expenditure of resources in the agricultural sector of the economy, with very minimal economic returns on investment. Iortina, Ukpanya and Ugbu (2011) also pointed out that Nigeria's effort in agricultural development over the past three decades have failed to improve the country's economy. A review of the sector depicts a gloomy picture as performance is reflected in environmental degradation, monitoring food deficits and decline in both Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and export earnings, while retail food stuff prices and import bills continue to be on the sharp increase. It has become imperative to transform the sector through emphasis in vocational agricultural education.

#### **Types of vocational agricultural education profession**

The central point here is how to make agriculture attractive to both youth and adults so that the stigma attached to manual labour could be removed or at least reduced to the barest minimum. Apart from the production aspects of farming there are other areas of focus in vocational agricultural education which is rather optimistic to expect the Nigerian youth to suddenly cultivate interest and enthusiasm in farm work and agric-business. Vocational agricultural education must as thumps rule install some strategies to attract the youths and adults in plateau state to off farm agricultural occupations. It is expected that off farm occupations in agric-business will undoubtedly attract educated elites towards agricultural occupations.

The application of technological development in manufacturing and processing agricultural products calls for much higher levels of skills and technical knowhow on the part of skilled employees today, than was formally the case in plateau state. Hence the involvement of youths and adults into skilled occupation areas in vocational agricultural education will definitely increased their social, cultural, economic growth and good governance of the communities in plateau state, Nigeria.

There are several types of vocations in agricultural education for the enhancement/ promotion of social, cultural, economic growth and

indeed good governance in Plateau state, which (Agbulu and Wever, (2010), Denga, (2011, and Ochu, (2006) considered as off farm agricultural occupations. These include among others:- jobs in production, processing, packaging, marketing of farm products, feed industry, farm machinery industry, agricultural chemicals industry, horticultural/landscaping industry, livestock's industry, soil science and land management industry, crop credit education, wildlife and recreation industry, forestry and conservation, craftsmanship, poultry industry, crop processing and marketing industry.

It is important to briefly explain the composition and prospects in some of the major vocational areas listed above.

- **Agricultural supplies and entrepreneur:** specialist in this area takes care of agric-business and provides services through supplies of all agricultural equipment insurance, finance, credit, record keeping, and legal aspect of agriculture. Youth and adults taking vocation in this area can uplift their social, cultural and economic growth of their families and the country.
- **Agricultural machinery sales and services:** specialists in this area are concern with the development, manufacturing of agricultural tools and machinery and general dealerships of the machines.
- **Dairy manufacturing and processing:** specialist in this field are concern with the processing of dairy products into cheese, canned milk, butter, powder milk, milk candy, milk maid, yoghurt e.t.c
- **Livestock processing and marketing:** specialist in this field are concern with merchandizing of cattle, sheep, goats and other pets of economic importance and the processing of the meat and skins for leather industries.
- **Poultry industry:** specialist in this area are concern with the setting, maintaining and merchandizing of poultry birds, meat, egg sales, processing and general marketing of poultry by products.
- **Crop processing and marketing:** specialists in this area are concern with purchase and processing, packaging of all agro-based processing industry and the general merchandizing of the products to whole sale and retailers.
- **Forestry and conservation:** Specialist in this area are concern with environmental control through production, maintenance of natural and artificial forest, provision of fuel, wood, energy and bio-energy, products of tubers and other wood requirements of the community and the country at large.

- **Wildlife and recreation:** Specialist in this field are twin brothers to forestry and conservation. But particularly interested in keeping of games and maintain different species of wild animals and also create forest areas, which is really lucrative nowadays.
- **Ornamental/landscaping horticulture:** Specialists in this field are concern with beautifications, using assorted cut-flowers, potted, indoor and outdoor for both interior and exterior decorations. Landscaping is becoming a very big industry in Nigeria today especially in urban cities where modern buildings are being erected. Plateau state in particular has a comparative advantage in ornamental horticulture, because temperate flowers can grow favorably due to climatic condition of the state. Flowers of high prestige and value are used in funeral ceremonies, and rigs for distinguish personnel across all professions. Vocation in this area can give an all round improvement of the social, cultural and economic growth of both youth and adult in the community.
- **Agricultural chemicals and technical operations:** specialists in this field are concern with the procurement, distribution and sales of assorted agro-chemicals, ranging from herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and nematocides. As well as the general applications of these agro-chemicals to farms. They can be in charge of service delivery through instructions and consultancy services to farmers in their communities. This can boost their economic profile, increase their social lives and above all create mutual respect and integrity.

Ochu (2006) pointed out that the shift of attention from agriculture denied Nigeria's economy of an opportunity, which could have brought about the development of agro-allied and processing industries; Nigerian has since remained a country bogged down by importation at the expense of the development of local industries. The resulting effect is the large number of job seekers who have no place in the oil industry. Even with the expansion of the industry, unemployment has continued to grow at an alarming rate.

Agbulu and Wever, (2011) observed that it is unfortunate to say that agriculture at the secondary and tertiary levels of our education focus on technology transfer, research, and concepts for planning and execution of project management skill delivery which is the compendium of vocational agricultural education curriculum, agricultural development will by far increased and meet up with our national goals of achieving food sufficiency and economic growth by the year 2015 as stated in the Millennium Development Goals (MGD). The dearing need for vocational agricultural education in Plateau state is long overdue as agriculture has continue to contribute to the economic growth of the people. In another development as contained in agricultural economy and policy repair document that despite the rapid growth of the oil industry over the years, agriculture still accounts for 40% of GDP and provides employment both formal and informal for about 60% of Nigeria's 144 million people. In Plateau state, agriculture remain largely subsistence based, with about 80% of agricultural out puts coming from farmers who live unless than one dollar per day and farm less than one hectare. Therefore, farmers in Plateau state need vocational agricultural education to acquire more knowledge and skills to start and manage their own business and became successful in life. Thus vocational agricultural education can meet the occupational needs of farmers and youths who can transform agriculture from its subsistence nature and make maximum contribution to the economic growth of the entire nation and not that of Plateau state alone.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of vocational agricultural education is human resource development in terms of knowledge, skills acquisition, food production, poverty alleviation, provision of employment, raw materials for industries, social and economic growth and development of the communities. No community has ever been successful and developed without well educated people and a strong agricultural base that grantee food security, sound economic growth as well as good social and cultural order amidst visionary leadership.

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