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Short Communication

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Challenges Bedeviling Human Capital Development in the Nigerian Agricultural Sector and Educational Sector and Possible Solutions

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Abstract

The benefits of human capital development and investing in same cannot be overemphasized as over the years, nations that have towed similar lines in recognizing the wealth that investing in human capital development brings have testified that its pros far outweighs its cons. Nigeria being the largest African nation with a huge population within the work force range is seen to be lacking in this sphere as a vast majority of its citizens have lived the mainstream life of mediocre and this solely springs from the fact that human capital development is at its lowest ebb. In setting the foundation upon which this essay shall gravitate, we shall elicit the challenges bedeviling human capital development in the agricultural sector and educational sector. It is on the basis of the foregoing that subsequent issues on the crux of this essay would gravitate and succinct solutions proffered to curb the impending malaise.

Keywords: *Human capital development, Agricultural sector, Educational sector, Nigeria*

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with a vast wealth of human talent. However, human potential in Nigeria is not realized either as a result of maladministration or as a result of policy makers having an unrealistic belief that investment in small sub-sections of labor alone can drive sustainable inclusive growth. This is not tenable in the long term as investments in infrastructure and competitiveness must go hand in hand with investments in people¹. For Nigeria to thrive, Nigerians must thrive. The government of Nigeria must recognize the singular fact that investing in its people is a major determinant of their long-term economic success above all other factors.

Human capital means the knowledge and skill possessed by people to enable them create value in the economy while human capital development means building human resource base and providing enabling environment for all individuals to be fully engaged and contribute to national development efforts. Our government must move beyond strong rhetoric

¹ <<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/speech-by-bill-gates-at-the-national-economic-council.html>> last accessed on 29th November, 2019 at 9:15am

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to viable actions on human capital development especially in the agricultural sector. Some of the malaise facing human capital development in our agricultural sector is as a result of (i) lack of enlightenment in mechanized farming; (ii) poor infrastructural facilities; (iii) Absence of information technology; amongst others. Agriculture plays a significant role in the Nigerian economy and accounts for a substantial proportion of its total economic activity with over 70% of her population depending on it directly or indirectly as a means of livelihood. The vital position of agriculture in our economy therefore makes it necessary for this area to always meet up to the current trends and modes of farming.

Mechanized farming is the use of machinery and equipment to make farm work easier and faster in order to increase farm productivity. Local farmers in Nigeria are not enlightened in the mechanized way of carrying out farming which leads to poor output and in turn negatively affects our economy. According to Onwualu and Pawa (2004)², 90% of Nigeria's agricultural work is done with hand tools, 7% with animal-drawn tools and only 3% with engine powered technology. These figures are quite disturbing as poor enlightenment on the use of mechanized farming is a threat to our food security and food sufficiency. If food demand must meet supply so as to lead to equilibrium then the use of mechanized farming cannot be dispensed with.

The crux of human capital development also deals with creating an enabling environment. It makes no sense if we have enlightened people without proper infrastructural facilities to enable productivity and access to product as people without roads, ports and factories cannot flourish; and roads, ports, and factories without skilled workers to build and manage them cannot sustain an economy³. This is because creation of awareness and provision of infrastructural facilities are concomitant forces. A major case of poor infrastructure in the agricultural sector is poor road network. Good road network is a key factor in providing market linkages for rural farmers. Poor road infrastructure in rural communities does not only affect production and distribution of food, it also negatively affects the development of rural areas and food security amongst others.

For instance, the poor road conditions in rural communities makes it difficult for farmers in those communities to have access to interventions and amenities such as training and education, clean and affordable drinking water, health services and other forms of support. As a result, there is mass impoverishing of farmers, poor productivity, threat to food security and sufficiency and negative impact on our Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The unavailability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is also a major challenge to human capital development in Nigeria especially in the agricultural sector. Telecommunication grants ease of access to local farmers from whom products can be purchased. This would lead to a healthy cycle through which information passes from the farmer to the purchasers and to the final consumers and in turn close the gap between input and output in our economy. The problem with ICT development in the agricultural sector in Nigeria stems from poor access to ICT facilities, lack of computer knowledge and poor power supply.

The future workforce is captured by providing access to education for children, youths and adults alike. Basic education increases people's capacity to learn and to interpret information. Thus, education accelerates the rate of national development. However, in Nigeria the standard of education is low. Blumende (2001)⁴ reported that the decline in the quality of education cannot be ignored by anyone who is aware of the significant role of education as an instrument of social transformation and development. Good quality education and standard of school according to Asiyai (2012)⁵ depends largely on the provision, adequacy, utilization and management of educational facilities. This means proper funding by the government is essential in the educational system. The Nigerian educational system has failed in this light as Nigerian education expenditure represented 3.5% of GDP and 15.2% of total government expenditure. From the above, it means that education, both at the federal and state level in Nigeria is underfunded⁵. In Nigeria, what we have is a situation in which students enroll in schools but there is no commensurate increase and upgrade in the teaching facilities due to low priority being placed on education in budget allocation.

As we cannot afford to remain in this state, certain steps need to be taken, one of which is that emphasis must be placed by the government on the need to embrace the mechanized way of farming. The government can achieve this through holding webinars, seminars and symposiums the essence of which would be to educate the farmers of the

² See "Issues in Mechanised Farming in Nigeria" Consultancy, Research & Information Technology Department (CRIT) Industrial Training Fund (ITF) Headquarters, Jos, April 2012

³ Statement by Bill Bates at the Nigeria Human Capital Event Abuja, Nigeria ,March 27, 2018.

⁴ See Achugbue, Edwin Iroroavwo&Ochonogor, Wilson C., "Education and Human Capital Development through Appropriate Utilization of Information Services," *African Research Review, An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 7 (3), Serial No. 30, July, 2013:75-85. ⁵ *ibid*

⁵ *Ibid.*

benefits of mechanized system of farming, its impact on the economy and how it improves productivity. Also, these webinars and seminars would be strategized in such a manner that farmers are educated and taught how to apply these machines in farming. These programs will be taught in the native language of the farmers to in view of the fact that majority of them are illiterates. Besides the webinars, seminars and symposium, this essay suggest that there should be a six months' course curriculum set up by the government which deals with educating farmers about why and how mechanized farming is a better mode of farming.

In addition, this essay recognizes that most of these farmers do not have funds to purchase this equipment. To resolve this, funding should be made available by the government through creating access to loans and at the same time the government should sell these equipment at a subsidized rate. The burden seems like a lot on the part of the government bearing in mind that there are other sectors of the economy to focus on; but the fact remains that investments in sectors like agriculture would lead to more productive farms and factories and more productive farms would lead to more prosperous farmers who could expand their farms or invest in other businesses, especially if they had access to credit and other financial tools. These thriving farms, factories, and new businesses would lead to more government revenue. And the cycle would start again.

Creating an enabling environment is part of the subject matter of human capital development. It is the duty of the government to ensure the provision of long and lasting infrastructure especially in the agricultural sector. Fixing the appalling road conditions in rural areas will directly impact the productivity of farmers. Due to the ease of transporting farm materials and quicker access of experts and extension workers to farms, outputs could be greatly increased whilst it will help for supply to meet demand faster. The government of the day should channel certain amounts of the budget to road fixing. This would help create an enabling environment and prevent the scenario where farmers in the process of trying to transport their products especially perishable goods run into deficit due to the bad roads. Such situations have placed farmers in a very bad situation as he/she would have utilized efforts without reaping the fruit of it.

In the alternative, private organizations can engage in this road repair on the condition of TAX rebate. An example of a company that does this is Dangote's construction of Oshodi Road in Lagos. This would work by a concession by either the federal or state government to use the amount payable by a company or organization for a certain amount of years in the road construction. Still on infrastructure, the government should ensure the availability of water or renewable energy. As regards water, the government can build a reservoir this is to support irrigation planting, it is also a means of creating an enabling condition.

Information Communication Technology also enhances human capital development. ICT complements the point made earlier on webinar, as provisions of smart phones for farmers would allow them access to the internet which would in turn aid the webinar. Also, this essay recommends the creation of an application that is compatible with these smart phones; the operationalization of these application would be such that farmers can easily make request as regards fertilizers and make payments on delivery.

Education is a factor that develop both national and human capacity. The issue with education in Nigeria revolves around poor funding which stems from low budget allocation. The only way to remedy this is for the government officials and policymakers to see that education is the most important factor when it comes to a boost in human capital development. This essay suggests that there should be an increase in the percentage of the country's annual budget that goes into the educational sector. Aside the issue of budget is the problem of syphoning funds meant for facility upgrading. Strict measures should be put in place to prevent funds from being stolen and being used for their purpose.

Furthermore, there should be a general review of all the institutions of education in Nigeria starting from the primary cadre. The methodology of this review is such that a committee will be set up in each state ministry to inspect all the primary schools, both private and public, to determine whether their teaching facilities are up to the modern standards and if not, information should be giving to the Ministry of Education of the State which would in turn write to the appropriate authority. The essence of this is to ensure that funds are allocated to remedy the poor situation. In the cases of private institution, the owners of such institutions should be written to by the Ministry telling them to upgrade their system and if met by resistance, the school's accreditation should be withdrawn. This same procedure should apply for each section of the educational institution.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, economic policies without good leaders and policy makers that see investment in the people as priority is meaningless. We must all therefore undergo reorientation as a nation so that we can see that proper investment in people would lead the country to greater heights.

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