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i

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

1. *Ali S. Bagaji Yusufu* – Accentuation of Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Colonial African States: A Comparative Study of the British and French Ruling Styles.

2. *Ezeibe Christian Chukwuebuka* – African Growth and Opportunity Act: Myth and Reality.

3. *Ewuim Ngozi C.* – The Nigerian Foreign Policy and National Interest: Understanding the Contemporary Challenges.

4. *Ugorji Nene V. & Eberinwa Ogochukwu M.* – Bureaucratic Corruption and National Development in Nigeria (1979 – 2008).

5. *Professor F. C. Okoli & Dr. S. C. Ugwu* – Tracing the Historiography of the Nexus Between Policy and Administration in a Changing World.

6. *Ezeigwe Francisca O.* – Capacity Building in the Public Sector: A Tool for Achieving Sustainable Development.

7. *Dr. Mrs. M. A. O. Obi & Okolie C. Anthony* – Women Empowerment in Nigeria: An Imperative for Community Development.

8. *Jide Ibietan* – Public Policy Making Process: Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in Nigeria (1960 to Date).

9. *Agene U. Peterside* – Government Budget in Nigeria: A Systematic Explication.

10. *Sylvia Uchenna Agu, Phd* – Fiscal Federalism and Agitation for Resource Control in Nigeria: The Case of South-South 1990 – 2000.

11. *Oyerinde A. A.* – A Post Consolidation Analysis of Credit Management in Intercontinental Bank Plc. Nigeria (2003 – 2007).

12. *Akume Albert T.* – Decentralization for Good Administration: A Reflection on the Continuing Paradox of State Administration in Nigeria.

13. *Akume Albert T., Solomon Michael & Mohammed Onimisi Abu* – Conflict, the NYSC Program and the Question of Policy Relevance in Present Day Nigeria: An Assessment.

14. *Eberinwa Ogochukwu M.* – Local Government Disambigution: A Theoretical Exposition (The Nigeria Experience).

15. *Dr. (Mrs.) Mabel Angela Ogechukwu Obi & Ugwu Onwuma Julius* – Reward System in the Nigerian Civil Service: An Antagonism to Workers Motivation and Productivity.

16. *Dennis Nyameca Onyama (PhD/DBA)* – Understanding the Implications of Economic Regionalism: The Emergence of Fragmented International Trade.

17. *Christian N. Uzondu* – A Psychological X-Ray of the Function of Smoking.

18. *Chris N. Uzondu Ph.D. & Linda J. Ukwuani* – The Influence of Age and Gender on Viewing Violent TV Films on Aggressive Behaviour.

19. *Barr. Mrs. F. O. Orabueze* – Sharing De National Cake and other Poems.

PUBLIC POLICY MAKING PROCESS: AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN NIGERIA (1960 TO DATE)

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to highlight that successive Nigerian governments commit policy reversals and somersaults in the public policy making process using the agricultural and rural development policies as focus. In addition, intended policy beneficiaries are not carried along at the policy conception/formulation stage, hence implementation/execution are fraught with avoidable problems. These have been the bane of development efforts from independence to date. The paper is subdivided into: Abstract; Conceptual Issues; Public Policy Making Process; Agricultural and Rural Development Policies (1960 to date); Conclusion and Recommendations. The paper concluded cautiously that notwithstanding the odds against incrementalism as a decision-making model, since it seeks to guarantee continuity in government policies and programmes, it can redress the phenomena of policy reversals and somersaults which have become endemic in the Nigerian public policy making process. The paper recommended a collaborative approach with the critical section and stakeholders in the policy making process in order to stem the tide of disconnection between policy beneficiaries and the government. The paper also canvassed massive investment in training, research and development programmes through the strengthening of research centres/institutes.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Policy has been defined as a "course setting involving decisions of the widest ramifications and longest time perspective in the life of an organization" (Adamolekun, 1983:142). The above views (by Adamolekun) seem to capture the essence of policy when it is not delineated into public or private.

Public policy according to David Easton in Dye (1975:1) means "the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society". A critical analysis of this definition reveals that government alone possesses such attributes of authority to act on behalf of the whole society. Does it mean that everything the government chooses to do or not to do results in the "allocation of values"?

Ikelegbe in Obikeze and Obi (2004:94) responded to the above poser in his definition of public policy as "what government choose to do or not to do. It is the integrated courses and programmes of action that government has set and the frame work or guide it has designed to direct actions and practices in certain problem areas". Public policy is therefore a specific guide to governmental action and programmes of action in solving specific societal problems. It could be further inferred that such actions may transcend the stated intentions of government and its official to all actions of government.

In view of the numerous omissions and gaps inherent in some of the above definitions, and the tendency to impute elasticity of meanings as highlighted in Egonmwan (2000:1-2), Jenkins in Egonmwan (2000:3) defined public policy as:

> a set of interrelated decision by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle be within the power of those actors to achieve.

Egonmwan (2000) emphasized that the word "Selection" in the definition recognizes both decision and actions deliberately taken by government to solve a social problem are essential elements of public policy. Inherent in the definition are: that decision-makers were fully aware of choice of goals and the means to achieving them; decision-makers also gave consideration to one or more other proposals. Implied in Jenkins' definition above is the recognition of the need for availability of means to achieve given ends, the competence of specific persons to take decision on behalf of others and that a policy is not intended to provide an approach for handling all of society's problems but to offer solutions to limited situations. It is to this extent that Jenkins posited that public policy is "aggregative decision making" (Egonmwan 2000:3).

Other characteristics of Public policy include:

(a)   Public policy making is an exercise in power, in the manipulation of dependence relationship, and to the extent of its societal problem solving for limited situations, it inevitably involves political conflict.

(b)   It is not merely a continuous process of decisions and activities; it takes place principally but not exclusively within formal/legal organizational structure and agencies of the state (public bureaucracy).

(c)   It involves a variety of decision making, but could exclude the main line of action or detailed instruction to be followed, such as not permitting the use of personal discretion.

(d)   It is directed at the future, which implies that it is constantly concerned with probabilities and economic conditions that are subject to change. It therefore calls for rationality and not just exercise of power.

(e)   Public policies are expected to articulate and consolidate the aims that will satisfy public interests as justified by the government, sectional or self-seeking motives could be revealed on thorough analysis.

(f)   Public policy usually involves interaction with a wide spectrum of the critical mass of external interest group such as civil society organizations, advocacy groups, traders, farmers, professionals, industrialists and other development associations.

(g)   Policies involve exchange of information and resources. It entails discussion and bargaining between and within agencies of the state.

(h)   Not all decisions are of "policy status", except those of a strategic or guideline nature.

(i)   The state institutions that claim responsibility for public policies invariably legitimize their activities by asserting that their actions are in the general interest of the public and not for a sectional few.

PUBLIC POLICY MAKING PROCESS

There is agreement among a group of writers and scholars that the public Policy making process comprises the following: Policy formulation; Implementation; Feedback and Evaluation (Egonmwan, 2000:4-8; Uchendu, 2001:262; Obikeze and Obi, 2004:99-103). The next section therefore will attempt brief explanations on the three phases of the public policy making process.

POLICY FORMULATION AND DECISION MAKING THEORIES

It is the stage where government takes decisions on what should be done and how to achieve them. Okoli and Onah (2002:247) were quite specific by positing that "the formulation of policy proposal is usually the duty of the executive arm of government". According to Egonmwan (2000:5), the policy formulation process

involves (i) Goal formulation in which multiple groups operate with varying and often conflicting objectives; (ii) Problem identification and definition as a result of partial ignorance problem; (iii) Agenda setting involving attempts by individuals and groups to influence policy decisions (iv) Identifying policy alternatives and evaluating such policy alternatives (analysis of policy option) (v) Policy choice. Egonmwan (2000) noted that the output of the above process are usually expressed in government official documents in the form of legislative acts, decrees, policy statements, directives, laws and guidelines.

There are a number of models/theories used in policy formulation namely: Rational Comprehensive; Satisficing; Incrementalism; Mixed Scanning; Facet design and Choice theory of planning. The choice theory of planning formulated by Thomas Reiner and Paul Davidoff and the facet design theory on planning by Yehezkel Dror are not particularly popular in the Nigerian environment. Adebayo (2000) and Okoli (2004) observed that even the rational comprehensive model which successive Nigerian governments frequently lay claim to in policy formulation does not hold in view of the very high intelligence activity and the enormity of time required in arriving at the best course of action or alternative. Dibie (2000:33) adduced other reasons bedeviling its pure application in most developing nations, especially in Nigeria.

The rational comprehensive approach can be seen in phases ranging from problem identification; goal setting; information gathering, a search for alternatives and thorough investigation into each course of alternative to choosing the best course of action which is referred to as "rational". On the basis of the limitation and constraints involved in rational decision making, H. A. Simon (1976) in Obikeze and Obi (2004:123) propounded a modified version of decision making known as satisficing model in which the administrative man makes satisfactory decisions to solve the problem at hand. The Administrator "makes his choices using a simple picture of the situation that takes into account... a few of the factors that he regards as most relevant and crucial". The Administrator rather than being the economic man that maximizes, he satisfies-interested only in solutions that satisfy his problems. This is also referred to as "bounded rationality" because the administrator is bounded (limited) by the extent of his knowledge, information gathering at any one time, his values, skills, perception and time available for decision making.

Charles Lindblom's Incrementalist approach believes that decisions are not made as described above, instead there is step-by-step approach to administrative decision making which he referred to as "Successive-Limited-Comparison". This approach only widens or builds on earlier decisions made. A summary of the incremental theory was quoted in Obikeze and Obi (2004:123) thus: "A policy is

directed at a problem: it is tried, altered, tried in its altered form, altered again and so forth. In short, incremental policies follow one upon the other in the solution to a given problem". The implication of this is that incrementalism amounts to improvements and modifications of existing policies. The model does not support radical changes in government policies and programmes. This explains why Dror (1968) in Obikeze and Obi (2004:124) posited that the model" meets the needs of a stable society, where evolution leads to institutions that embody the wisdom of generations and that should not be carelessly endangered".

Incrementalism emphasizes caution in discarding government policies (especially by new regimes); it entrenches continuity in government policies; the incremental nature of government policies also makes it easy for the governed to be carried along. However, this approach to policy making has been criticized for being too conservative and maintaining status quo. It is also plausible to argue that the model is not suitable for the developmental aspirations of the developing economies that require some radical transformation. Incrementalism as an explanatory tool has failed to adduce reasons behind sudden changes in government policies and to that extent, offer limited uses. The dynamism of contemporary world occasioned by rapid technological changes and advancement may not require incremental approach to decision making.

Amitai Etzioni's mixed scanning is a mixture of the rational comprehensive and incremental models, and that is why it is not considered to be an original theory of decision making. To explain this model, Etzioni used an illustration of worldwide weather observation using two cameras: a broad angle camera that will cover all parts of the sky but not in detail and a second camera which will zero-in those areas revealed by the first camera to require a more indepth examination. The rational approach could be too detailed, while the incrementalist will merely focus on those areas in which similar patterns developed in recent past and perhaps on a few trouble spots. Etzioni posited that mixed scanning could be divided into two levels with varied degrees of detail and coverage, and the decision on how scanning should be done in each level depends on cost and time. He also canvassed that in utilizing mixed scanning, it is essential to differentiate between fundamental decisions (requiring the rational approach) and incremental decisions. The onus of evaluating the nature of decision to be taken rests on the decision maker who should be able to identify/choose the model that suits the situation.

As a decision making model, it attempts to rise to the inability of incrementalism in explaining radical changes in government policies. It also strives to accommodate the divergent capacities of decision makers as rationalists and incrementalists. However, as a model, it is too conciliatory and compromising to the

extent that it could not reconcile the different aspects o the two models. It has also been criticized for the arduous task placed on the decision maker in evaluating which model to apply in making fundamental and incremental decisions.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This is the stage where policy goals and objectives are translated into concrete achievements through various programmes. Scholars contend that this is the most difficult phase of the policy process, in view of several assumptions can take the form of faithful implementation, changes contemplated are technically feasible and that resources like money, materials and men (knowledge) are adequate and available to implement the policy. To this extent, distortions arise in the course of implementation.

The above therefore suggests that the socio-political context of the policy process, institutional performance/capabilities and identification of the target group should be carefully done and built into policy implementation. The need for proper consultation and considerations through effective communication network cannot be over emphasized, especially in handling those who will resist change that the policy may contemplate.

FEEDBACK AND POLICY EVALUATION

Feedback entails the gathering of information on the basis of comparison made between intended policy outcomes/results and actual achievements derived from experience gained during implementation. Egonmwan (2000:7) asserted that "when there is so much discrepancy between expected and actual effects of policy, these could lead to a reformulation based on evaluation or assessment of the situation". The main activity in policy evaluation is therefore a review of policy goals/ objectives (intentions) and the policy outcomes (results). However, based on experience and technical expertise, a lot of these reviews are carried out at the implementation stage in order to check discrepancies. In effect, there could be a blurring of the implementation and evaluation stages, when things are properly done at the policy formulation and implementation stages. Put differently, the separation between the implementation and evaluation stages is done more for analytical reasons.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the public policy making process in Nigeria is fraught with its difficulties and problems which Okoli and Onah (2002:250-253) articulated as follows: Inadequate definition of goals; Over-ambitious policy goals;

Lack of well-defined programme for attainment of goals; Choice of inappropriate organizational structure for implementation of policies; lack of continuity in commitment to policy; lack of clear definition or responsibility; political opposition during implementation; compromises during implementation capable of defeating policy purposes; political insensitivity to policy demands; (wrong) timing in implementation; corruption; lack of adequate data for decision making.

The role of public bureaucracy as civil and public servants in the public policy making process (with respect to policy (input) formulation and as implementers) is not in dispute. Detailed discussion of these are contained in Adebayo (2000:67-91); Adamolekun (2000) and Adamolekun (2006:119-140, 222-236), and same need not bore us here. In the next section, attempts will be made to highlight the various agricultural and rural development programmes/policies in Nigeria from Independence to date. The impact (if any) of the decision making models discussed earlier on the public policy making process will be examined.

AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES (1960 to DATE)

The first republic (1960-1966) was almost inseparable from the colonial era in the sense that the agricultural policy was geared towards the cultivation of export crops, thus it can be persuasively argued that there was a continuation of the British agricultural and rural development policy in this period.

The thirteen year military rule that followed, embarked upon aggressive and far reaching agricultural and rural development policies until a deceleration set in, owing largely to the discovery of oil and its attendant boom. This marked the typical manifestation of "Dutch Disease" (Ibeanu, 2008:16).

Viewing the state of the economy especially in the pre-civil war years, the Gowon administration embarked upon the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in order to boost the production of agricultural yields-food and cash crops for local consumption and export aimed at increasing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) respectively. It is however unfortunate that this policy could not be pursued vigorously and with the assiduity it required because of the civil war and subsequently due to the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region, Michael and Ibrahim (2003:71) underscored this point clearly in their discourse.

It is perhaps noteworthy that for sometime, agriculture remained the largest contributor to employment, accounting for two-thirds of the labour force of Nigeria and the largest contributor to GDP. However, there was a reversal of this state of

affairs to the extent that the share of agriculture to GDP fell from 61.2% in 1962 to 54.9% in 1966, 24.7% in 1973 and 12.1% in 1980 (Michael and Ibrahim, 2003:71).

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme had the following objectives: large-scale irrigation schemes; grain production on national farms; budgetary concessions to large commercial farmers; and integrated rural development projects. However, as earlier highlighted, these stated objectives were not realized.

The Mohammed/Obasanjo regime embarked upon Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme which aimed at maximizing national welfare. To narrow this down, it entails increased food production to feed the teeming population; to boost the nation's Balance of Payments position; to fight inflation; and to deal with what the Third National Development Plan called a "tragedy" – the shortage of food and poor nutrition. The zeal with which these policies were pursued led to the establishment of agro-industry based banks like the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) and the Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry to assist in giving loans to farmers to boost agricultural production. When objectively analysed, it can be observed that the right category of (occupational) farmers were not catered for, loans were given to non-farmers and the enabling environment for addressing the objectives of the programme took flight, and these accounted for the low performance of this agricultural and rural development initiative.

The Shagari administration in an attempt to boost food production embarked upon the "Green Revolution" programme. It is plausible to argue that the government attempted to build the Green Revolution initiative on the rational comprehensive model of policy making. This is corroborated by research findings which showed that successive governments seem to be aware of escalating food prices and rural poverty which are explicable in the light of rigid farming and cultural practices/traits, outmoded tools and rapid population growth.

An in-depth analysis of the above portrayed the use of intelligence activity which is basic to the rational comprehensive model. The Nigerian policy makers were able to identify that the traditional techniques and attitudes to agriculture and livestock production are the main causes of both rural poverty and low productivity. Added to these, the thrust of government policy was to introduce better productive technology in order to increase output per man-hour, per hectare and per animal. Underlining this policy initiative was the quest for domestic food sufficiency and a surplus for export. The method for achieving these was found in large scale irrigation schemes as manifested in the establishment of Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) and River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs) across the country in the 1980s and massive investment in agriculture.

For details on these and other rural development strategies adopted in Nigeria, see Okoli and Onah (2002:163-185).

In furtherance of the above, government's commitment included: provision of seeds; marketing; land clearing; control of soil erosion; rural integrated projects; development of grazing reserves among others. To what extent were these goals backed with necessary action? Often times, government lacks the political will, patience and sincerity of purpose to drive its policies/goals to fruition. This point was underscored by Ogunsanya (2002:50) in his Inaugural lecture. Green Revolution as an agricultural and rural development programme failed due to policy inconsistencies and impatience. It has been argued for instance that in terms of objective and orientation, Green Revolution was the same with Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the only difference was that each was launched by a new regime. The import of this is that, it would have been in order for the Shagari administration to continue with the OFN to enable it run a full course and implementation. This explains the nature of government developmental programmes in Nigeria with the attendant reversals and somersaults in policy formulation and implementation.

The Buhari/Idiagbon regime initiated a "Back to Land" agricultural policy which had the sole aim of self-sufficiency in food production. Like any agricultural and rural development programme before it, it achieved little owing to inherent weakness like inadequacy of data, insufficient input and technological deficiencies among others.

The Babaginda administration came up with the Directorate of Foods, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). Some analysts viewed DFRRI as being incremental to agricultural and rural development programmes before it, and this is epitomized by the objectives that DFRRI was to achieve. Among its aims/objectives were to: Provide food to feed the teeming population; open up the rural areas with the intention of reducing transport inhibitions and providing motorable feeder roads; provide basic (social and economic) infrastructures like electricity, potable drinking water and other essential facilities that will make the rural areas very attractive to inhabit. The overall effect of this is to stem the rising tide of rural-urban drift and rural poverty. To be sure, Onah (2006:95-96) clearly established that DFRRI was one of the Poverty Alleviate Programmes (PAP) of the Babangida administration.

To what extent did DFRRI achieve its objectives? Onah (2006), Okoli (2004), and Okoli & Onah (2002) among others attempted to answer this question. A synopsis of DFRRI's activities was collated, while certain achievements were visible, others are contestable depicting that DFRRI was a mixed bag following the patterns of programmes before it due in the main to the following: Inadequacy of finance to execute the enormous task of rural development; Insufficient supply of the

caliber of personnel required in all segments of DFRRI's activities; Misapplication of the federal character principle to rural development problems; Inadequate involvement of rural people in DFRRI's programmes, unnecessary duplication of rural development agencies and problems of overlapping jurisdiction/ responsibilities.

The administrations that succeeded the Babangida regime could be described as "surrogate". The surrogacy commenced from Chief Ernest Shonekan, through General Sani Abacha to General Abdulsalami Abubakar, and there witnessed a carryover of programmes.

Notwithstanding that this present democratic experiment have been able to identify that "the … problem was a lack of implementation strategy" in highlighting the enormous potentials of agriculture in Nigeria, Sayyadi Abba Ruma (Former Agriculture Minister) in Kolawole (2009) averred further that "there were no benchmarks, no timelines, no clearly established markets". These gave rise to the Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (CADP) of this administration with the intention of developing the tripod of production, storage and processing.

The CADP have five basic components in the acronymns of *START; EFAT; MARKETS; WARMIN AND RUSEP.*

START as an intervention package means Strengthening Agriculture through Regulatory Transformation. This is intended to create a strong regulatory framework for the policies in order to enhance continuity.

EFAT stands for Enhanced Funding for Agricultural Transformation which aims at creating "robust funding" through budgetary provisions, subsidies and concessionary loans with single-digit interest.

MARKETS stand for Maximizing Agricultural Revenue in Key Enterprises. This is a market project that aims at focusing on areas of comparative advantage, and there is a Guaranteed Minimum Price (GMP) mechanism with government as the buyer of first and last resorts in order to stabilize market prices and make farmers comfortable. To this end, "twenty silo complexes for storage and agro processing are being built all over the country" (Kolawole, 2009).

The fourth package (WARMIN) translates to Water and Aqua-culture Resources Management in Nigeria. This is meant to take effective care and management of water and aquatic resources and this is critical to production.

The fifth is Rural Sector Enhancement Programme (RUSEP). This is geared towards rural development through feeder roads, rural telephony and other community-based programmes.

For emphasis, the MARKETS projects highlighted above will give birth to:

> Agro-Input centres which would be one-stop shops for cheap, high quality inputs in 300 locations; integrated livestock and fish markets in eight sites respectively; farmers markets in 18 sites for organized display and sale of food products; food courts in 10 sites for hygienic marketing, distribution and processing of food items; and 10 export crop handling, preservation and conditioning centres to provide for best global practice and make Nigerian produce of export quality (Kolawole, 2009).

Kolawole (2009) quoting Ruma averred further that "the commodity Out grower Development and Extension Service Centres…will support 19 million farming families in 20 centres all over the country". In addition, one million jobs would be generated "in the next one year through the extension services".

A few questions and commentary arising from the fore going are: Did government consult the critical mass and sector (occupational farmers) in formulating these programmes? Were the civil society groups considered (as partners) or what are their roles? The programmes appear to be an offshoot of previous ones with modifications here and there-they appear more like an incremental model or borrowing from Etzioni mixed scanning model. Whatever the responses to the above posers and observations are, time will reveal the justification of these programmes/projects upon which government believes that the Nigerian agricultural and rural development sector will be taken to the next level.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted a discussion on the public policy making process using the Nigerian agricultural and rural development initiatives from independence to date as reference. Concepts and decision making models were critically examined in relation to their impact on the policy making process. It was observed through a review of relevant literature that notwithstanding the odds against incrementalism as decision making model, it helps to maintain continuity in government policies and programmes.

The inference to be drawn from the above is that such a model can actually fedress the phenomena of policy reversals and somersaults that is typical of successive Nigerian governments in the policy making process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) This paper recommends that there should be a change of emphasis in the public policy making process, such that a close collaboration should be fashioned out with the critical mass (farmers, rural dwellers and other interest groups) in the agricultural and rural development policies. This has the potency of permanently addressing the disconnection between government and the anticipated beneficiaries, especially in policy formulation and implementation.

(b) Closely linked to the above, the organizational structure of the policy process should feature occupational/rural farmers very well, this can be achieved if "disguised farmers" are displaced and the system obliterates such parasitic group.

(c) Farming/agricultural committees should be initiated at the community level, headed by well respected member who is versed in the activities of the community to champion the collective aspirations of the rural peasantry.

(d) There should be a permanent strategy for development that is devoid of Crash programmes. One major characteristic of policy is that it must have short and long term objectives which can be subdivided into phases. This is to enhance policy execution and evaluation.

(e) Training and development programmes should be instituted on a continuous basis to groom personnel. This gesture will arm agricultural extension workers with requisite skills and farming practices. The extension workers will in turn disseminate the relevant knowledge to the "active" rural farmers.

(f) As a corollary to the above, research in agricultural and rural development initiatives should be seen and pursued as "work in progress and ongoing" all the time. It is to this extent that our research centres/institutes deserved adequate and continuous finding, as well as the right caliber of personnel.

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