

LEAD DEBATE ON THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF A BILL FOR AN ACT TO AMEND THE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF NIGERIA AND FOR OTHER MATTERS CONNECTED THEREWITH, 2017 (SB 315)

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Mr. President, Distinguished Senators, permit me to lead the debate on this very important Bill for an Act to Amend the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria and for other matters connected therewith, 2017 (SB 315).

This Bill was read for the first time in this hallowed Chamber on Thursday 9th March, 2017.

Background

The Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) Act was enacted in 1999 but effective take-off of the Council was in 2006 with the statutory mandate of coordinating, supervising and regulating agricultural research, training and extension in the fifteen (15) National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) and the eleven (11) Federal Colleges of Agriculture (FCAs) under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The existing structure and organization in the National Agricultural Research system (NARs) is not sufficiently effective in responding to the government's demand for cost-effective management, generation of appropriate technologies, agricultural growth and the improved livelihoods of the rural poor.

The key sections which the Bill seeks to amend are -

1. Section 2 of the Act – Governing Board

2. **Section 4** – Remuneration and Allowances
3. **Section 5** – Functions of the Council
4. **Section 6** – Appointment of the Executive Secretary and other Staff
5. **Section 7** - Application of the Pension Reform Act, 2004
6. **Section 8** - Establishment of the National Agricultural and Extension Endowment Fund
7. **Section 8** - Insertion of new Part V1
8. **Section 17**

This amendment seeks to pool all staff of research institutes under the control and management of ARCN for effectiveness and Repeal the National Agricultural Research Institutes Act 1964 and Research Institutes (Establishment, etc.) Order 1975.

9. **First Schedule** - Committees of the Board

The Bill seeks to establish a Science and Technical Research Committee, and the Agricultural Sciences Recruitment Board (ASRB) to be saddled with the recruitment of scientists for the system.

10. **Second Schedule** - Governing Boards of Research Institutes

11. **Insertion of new Third Schedule**

This Bill further seeks to allow the Council to give policy directions to the Colleges; properly enshrine the establishment of the Colleges in the ARCN Act; and list the Federal Colleges in a new Third Schedule to the Act thereby making the Colleges backed by enabling law.

Justification for the amendments

Agriculture constitutes one of the important sectors of Nigeria's economy. This is because Nigeria has highly diversified agro-ecological regions, which make the production of a wide range of agricultural products possible. The agricultural sector currently employs a significant portion of the labour force, source of export revenue earning and contributes over 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Ironically, in spite of this agricultural resource and technical endowment as well as several interventions by successive administrations, Nigerian agricultural sector has been operating far below its potential because the research institutes or centers are not well coordinated and strengthened.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, this Bill seeks to eliminate –

- i. the multiplicity of Governing Boards as Individual Governing Boards for research institutes and Federal Colleges of Agriculture have often led to high cost of governance, and over-bloating of the system, often with inappropriately qualified staff;
- ii. Unwarranted administrative and bureaucratic interference;
- iii. Absence of proper alignment of the role of Colleges within the training-extension/research-extension nexus context;
- iv. Lack of alignment of the system of operation of University-based Research Institutes with other NARIs;
- v. The seeming brain drain from the RIs including the Federal Colleges of Agriculture to the Universities due to better conditions of service in the latter;
- vi. Recent erroneous declassification of ARCN Secretariat from being a research organization by Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation; and
- vii. Insufficient & inconsistent funding of research programmes in NARIs and core middle-level manpower activities of FCAs.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, it is instructive to note that most countries that make a significant landmark in agricultural development have a

well-coordinated and structured Research Council, for instance, The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science (CAAS), Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS), the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and the Indonesian Agency for Agricultural Research and Development (AARD) are examples of Managing Councils in their respective countries. They are saddled with the responsibility for coordinating, funding and managing research programmes and enjoy autonomy in planning and executing research so as to best utilize the available resources.

Agriculture is driven by technologies and technologies are in turn generated by research. Agriculturally advanced countries are only so advanced because of a workable and well-funded agricultural research system.

Mr. President and my Distinguished Colleagues, the amendment of this Act has come at the right time when the Country is focusing on the diversification of the economy. No doubts, the agricultural sector will be a major field player in this regard. It is therefore apt to strengthen the mandate and powers of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria so that they can coordinate, manage and articulate the needed research into agricultural production that can guarantee food security in the country and in the long run ensure export opportunities.

In line with our Standing Order 77(3), this Bill does not have any financial implication on the government as the structures for the operations are already in place.

Once again I thank you Mr. President and Distinguished Colleagues for your attention and urge you to support this Bill for the second reading and ensure its accelerated passage.