

LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO AMEND THE TERTIARY EDUCATION TRUST FUND (ESTABLISHMENT, ETC.) ACT 2011 TO EXPRESSLY PROVIDE THAT THE COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE SHALL BENEFIT FROM THE FUND 2020 (SB 93)

SPONSORED BY SENATOR ABDULLAHI ADAMU (NASARAWA WEST)

PREAMBLE

The Bill for an Act to amend the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Est. Etc.) Act 2011 (SB 93) was read the first time in this hallowed chamber on Thursday 10th October, 2019. This Bill seeks to expressly provide for the Colleges of Agriculture to benefit from the Fund.

JUSTIFICATION

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, Agriculture occupies a very important priority in the programme of this administration. One of the steps that need to be taken to promote agriculture is the strengthening of Agricultural extension which the Agricultural Colleges across the country serve as training ground. Unfortunately, the learning conditions in most of these Colleges have been most deplorable. Infrastructures have dilapidated and the Colleges find it very difficult to attract the attention of Government. With the establishment of Education Trust Fund (ETF) and up till 2011 when the law establishing the fund was reviewed, the Colleges were beneficiaries of the ETF Scheme. While the intervention lasted, the colleges experienced remarkable upgrading and enhancement in infrastructural development and learning facilities.

However, with the review of the law and enactment of the TETFUND Act, Colleges of Agriculture were excluded as beneficiaries of the funding of TETFUND because of a controversial clause that listed beneficiaries as Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. By implication the Nation seems to be treating Agricultural Colleges as Non-Tertiary Institutions. One then wanders what is it that these Institutions do that the

Colleges of Agriculture do not do to warrant this segregation. For information of the Council Colleges of Agriculture conforms to all standards and practices enshrined in the educational policies specified for Tertiary Institutions of this Country such as:

1. The Colleges run Courses leading to National Diploma and Higher National Diploma and are subjected to accreditation by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE);
2. The academic programmes are regulated by NBTE as the Polytechnics;
3. Students are admitted through UTME as every other tertiary institution in the country; and
4. Graduates of the Colleges undergo the mandatory one year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as graduates of all other tertiary institutions.

There are to date over 52 Colleges of Agriculture and related disciplines in Nigeria comprising both State and Federal government owned running programmes in various fields of agriculture. There are 11 Colleges under the direct supervision of the ARCN with 5 others directly supervised by the various departments of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. These Colleges like all other Polytechnics were established to run programmes that can produce middle level manpower to meet the high demand for personnel to drive the agricultural sector. However, with modernisation and introduction of Agribusiness the Colleges introduced courses that will make agriculture more meaningful. Apart from the core Agricultural courses such as Agronomy and Animal Production, Agricultural Colleges now run programmes such as Dairy Production, Science Laboratory Technology, Computer Science and Statistics, Horticulture, Soil Science, Cooperative Science, Business Science, Economics and Marketing, Fish Production, Agricultural Technology and Hides and Skin Technology. All these courses are studied at both National Diploma and Higher National Diploma levels and like courses run by Polytechnics, they are all regulated by the National Board for Technical Education. It is worth mentioning that Agricultural Colleges provide a substitute for persons seeking advanced knowledge in many areas and those graduates of these Institutions are good materials for self-employment and wealth creation. The minimum requirements for the accreditation of these programmes are the same as provided by the nation's educational policy global best practice. These include adequate infrastructure, personnel, especially lecturers who acquired requisite qualification up to PhD level for teaching, research and community service.

Mr. President, my Distinguished Colleagues, the irony of the situation is that, Departments in Polytechnics that run programmes in Agriculture and related disciplines benefit from the TETFUND whereas the Colleges of Agriculture are excluded as beneficiaries. Unfortunately, this exclusion from the intervention has brought about some very negative effects to the developments of the Colleges prominent amongst which are:

1. Depletion of Competent staff that move to the newly established Universities where sponsorship for research exist through the TETFUND. Investigations have shown that most of the newly established and even the older Universities draw their staff from these Colleges relying on their inability to sponsor research and post-graduate studies.
2. Highly skilled personnel who managed to stay and sponsor themselves are attracted to and eventually move to the Universities or Polytechnics.
3. Loss of accreditation due to inadequate staff, ill-equipped laboratories, lack of modern facilities for new Agricultural programmes for value chain courses.
4. Poor library and e-learning facilities.
5. Reduced carrying capacity due to infrastructural decay.
6. Many states Colleges have started to change their status to that of Polytechnics and abandoned the teaching of Agricultural programmes in order to benefit from TETFUND intervention.

It seems the predicament is due to the name, College of Agriculture. Little wonder some State Houses of Assembly have enacted laws to change some Colleges of Agriculture to polytechnics. If this trend continues, we will eventually not have institutions to train middle level manpower in agriculture. It is our belief that the 2011 review classifies Colleges of Agriculture as Polytechnics in view of the following reasons:

- i. The curriculum they operate is same with those run by Polytechnics;
- ii. They award the same certificate with polytechnics (ND and HND)
- iii. They are all regulated by the NBTE which also regulates the Polytechnics; and
- iv. Polytechnics offer courses in Agriculture and the Agricultural programmes in those POLYTECHNICS benefit from the TETFUND interventions.

What is Polytechnic?

In the absence of any statutory meaning of these terms, the next step is to seek guide from the relevant Laws regulating each of the categories. The relevant regulatory institution of Polytechnic is the NBTE. The NBTE Act did not define the word "Polytechnic." It merely provides under Section 5 that the Board is to regulate technical and vocational education.

The Law:

(1) The TETFUND Act

Section 3 of the Act sets out the purpose of the Fund as rehabilitation, restoration and consolidation of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Section 6 provides its broad function which, mainly is to disburse funds to various public tertiary educational institutions in the country and to monitor the utilisation of the disbursed funds.

Section 20 of the Act defines tertiary educational institutions as Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. However, the Act did not further give the meaning of a polytechnic.

(2) National Board for Technical Education Act

Under Section 5, the function of the Board is to advise FGN on and coordinate all aspects of technical and vocational education in Nigeria for the training of middle level-manpower in these areas. The position of the law as contained in the NBTE is that polytechnics are institutions that run Technical and vocational programmes leading to the award of ND and HND.

Flowing from the above provisions of the law, Colleges of Agriculture fall under the category of Polytechnics since they offer courses and award certificates and Diploma in vocational and Technical education. To justify the continued denial a new categorisation has been introduced which refer to Colleges of Agriculture as Monotechnics but Monotechnics are mere descriptive terms with no specific definition under the Act.

Areas of Amendments

The Bill seeks to amend the following –

1. **Section 20** – By: (1) enlarging the interpretation of the word "tertiary education institutions" to include "the Colleges of Agriculture and related disciplines".

(2) By further interpreting the words 'related disciplines' to include – Federal Colleges of Land Resources; Federal Cooperative Colleges; Federal Colleges of Fisheries and Marine Technology; Federal Colleges of Produce Inspection and Stored Product Technology.

2. **Section 7(3)** – By deleting the ratio 2:1:1 as between Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education and inserting the words “Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Colleges of Agriculture”.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, it might interest you to note that the situation in the Colleges of Agriculture is deplorable due to their removal from benefitting from the TETFUND. This has affected their growth. The Colleges continue to be depleted as experienced Staff prefer to join the services of Universities and Polytechnics; basic training facilities have dilapidated which the resultant effect of poor training of students.

Finally, of all the institutions of higher learning only the Colleges of Agriculture do not benefit from any form of intervention whereas the Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and other institutions benefit from TETFUND, PTDF, NDIC and CBN interventions among others.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

The Bill will not accrue additional financial commitment to the government as there is already an existing fund from which it is expected to benefit from.

CONCLUSION

I urge you therefore Distinguished Colleagues to support this Bill as its accelerated passage will enable the Colleges of Agriculture benefit from the TETFUND thereby greatly enhancing agricultural research and productivity.