

University Report

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

MS 4577/2/37

"UNIVERSITY REPORT"

NO. 200

Broadcast 14th, 16th, 17th and 18th May, 1972

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

In this week's 'University Report' two accounts of work being done by University Departments of Agriculture to increase the amount of food produced by ordinary farmers. It is in such fields (sorry I couldn't resist the pun) that the non-academic person can most readily appreciate the value of detailed and pain-staking research. The Extension Department of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ghana, Legon, is carrying out a scheme which will take the results of their research back direct to the farmer, while at the University of Malawi the Department of Agriculture has begun a commercial project that is, I think, unique.

PROFESSOR PINNEY:

It's one of these things that happens in developing countries which make our universities, in the developing countries, quite different to the traditional view of academic institutions well separated from the on-going economic aspects of the nation.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Ted Pinney, Professor of Agriculture at the University of Malawi and we'll be hearing from him later in the programme.

Now the importing of quantities of staple foods is a tremendous drain on the financial resources of any country that's fighting to improve its balance of trade, and the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ghana is using its Department of Extension to discover how best to tackle the job of increasing productivity down on the farm. Bortei Doku is Senior Lecturer in the Department and he talked to Christine Oppong about the scope of the problem. For instance, as she pointed out, although Ghana needs to import such staples as rice, maize, yams, plantains and cassava, and although the price is often a high one in the markets, the layman sees around him well-watered land lying unused.

MR. B. DOKU:

Although you see a lot of land about you and you see some farms, it appears we are now stretching our farmers beyond the limits of their capacities. As you know we have subsistence farmers doing hoe and cutlass farming. A few years ago we had eighty per cent of the population in agriculture. They were able to feed the rest in the urban sector with their small surplus: now we have only about sixty per cent in agriculture still using hoe and cutlasses with a large urban population and they are not able any more to feed the urban population with the little surplus they produce to the subsistence system of farming, so I think that is why this is a major problem.

MRS. C. OPPONG:

And what has the Extension Department been doing then to try to bridge this gap between the needs and the supply?

MR. B. DOKU:

What we are doing now is to help the farmers increase production on the little acreages that they are handling. For instance through the use of fertilisers, crop protection, agricultural chemicals for crop protection, high yielding varieties, a farmer should be able to produce more even on the same two acres of land he was producing before.

MR. C. OPPONG:

What do the farmers themselves feel about their own difficulties and what are their priorities?

MR. B. DOKU:

Oh their priorities are quite different, they are not really concerned with increasing food production, they are seriously concerned with improving upon their own environment. For instance, they want better water supplies, they want better roads, they want better transportation systems and you find these priorities going against purely agricultural priorities, and that is one of our handicaps of working with them.

MRS. C. OPPONG:

In what ways have you been helping them?

MR. B. DOKU:

Well what we are doing is we train extension staff in the university and we are making our extension staff realise that just going to talk about agriculture is not the real thing that farmers are interested in. Farmers want to be talked to about their own priorities, so the best thing to do to get the farmer on your side is to listen to him first and find out what his priorities are, and how best you can help him. Then when the farmers know, at least you sympathise with them, you can start to talk about agriculture. But merely going to a village or speaking to farmers about using fertilisers when in fact what they want is water does not help them very much and they don't really respond very well.

- GWYNETH HENDERSON: So it sounds as though anyone doing agricultural extension work needs a smattering of psychology as well. Well inter-disciplinary projects are now, quite rightly in my opinion, all the rage these days as we've heard often in 'University Report'. And here's an interesting combination from Legon: Bortei Doky told Christine Oppong about a joint village project for which his department has joined forces with the Ghana Medical School.
- MR. B. DOKU: They've taken an area and they want to find out exactly what are the ailments of the population and what causes their ills, their diseases and so on, and they have have the Agricultural Extension Department involved in it. We are trying to find out which crops the farmers grow and which crops we can recommend for them to grow to improve upon their diet. It is a comprehensive project with several statisticians taking records of what is happening.
- MRS. C. OPPONG: What is the future? Do you think that the Extension Department needs to do a lot more basic research on how to get new ideas across to the farmers, or do you feel now that the main thing is to train Extension Officers using the present accumulated knowledge and experience?
- MR. B. DOKU: No, I think we have to do a lot more research. If you take the research on Crop Production for instance which has given us information we extend. We have been doing research on what we might call 'pure' cropping, only maize or only cassava, or only ground nuts, we've no mixed cropping as farmers have. But when you go to these villages you find our farmers, almost a hundred per cent, do mixed cropping, and you cannot give recommendations which are applied to a pure stand to a farmer who is doing mixed cropping and this is where we have not done sufficient research and I believe we should direct a lot more attention to what the farmers do. Find out how best we can help them in their own patterns of farming, and then find out what they are capable of adopting. If the farmer can't buy fertilisers it's no use pushing fertilisers. Maybe some other innovations might work just as well, or what might be something within his limits.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: That certainly sounds practical enough. But so far we have been hearing about what benefits the farmer, and what benefits the national economy. But will there be any benefit to academic development? Christine Oppong wondered whether there would be an opportunity for students to take up post-graduate extension research.

MR. B. DOKH:

Yes, we are introducing a Masters Degree in Extension, say from October 1972. The idea being that unless you've got post-graduate students working in the field, going into local problems, it will take a long time actual research officers can cover all our problems. It has been fashionable to travel out to the States or Britain or somewhere to do a Masters Degree, by this they go and solve problems in those countries leaving the local problems unsolved so we are now encouraging local post-graduate work and local research.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Bortei Doku talking about a fairly comprehensive approach to increasing output per acre on Ghanaian farms. There's a quite specific approach to the same problem in Malawi where the University has set up a new commercial seed production unit. High quality seed is essential to start with if the farmer's efforts are to be rewarded fully at harvest. But developing such seed takes time, money and know-how and there's seldom enough of all three available in one place. We're used to the idea nowadays of universities providing consultancy and research services to governments and the private sector but the Commercial Seed Production Unit is particularly unusual and interesting development. Professor Ted Pinney, Principal of the Bunda College of Agriculture explains to Douglas Lamb that in Malawi at the present time the production of large amounts of seeds of various kinds, and especially of maize seed is hampered by the lack of the really large farming units and also by the lack of expertise.

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY:

The really new development is, I think, Bunda's role in attempting to provide a stop-gap facility for the production of commercial seed while the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation is establishing its commercial seed farms. Now these commercial seed farms are designed primarily, at the moment, to produce seed for internal consumption in Malawi. But there is basically no reason why Malawi could not become a net exporter of seeds in addition to providing its own needs.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

That's just the sort of possibility that provides the incentive for thinking up a brand new approach and Professor Pinney obviously relishes the opportunity.

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY:

It's one of these things that happens in developing countries which make our universities in the developing countries quite different to the traditional view of academic institutions well separated from the on-going aspects of the nation.

DOULGAS LAMB: Are there any other universities in Africa or colleges which have tried this kind of thing?

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY: Well there are a number of them that have been involved in pilot projects. For example Egerton College in Kenya, has a commercial farm which grows wheat seed for sale, but this is really strictly a commercial operation and the farm at Egerton is run on a strict commercial basis and isn't really associated with the work at the college except as a possible use as a demonstration unit. Other than that I know of no farm, no university or college associated farm, which is directly tied to the establishment and stimulation of growth of a commercial seed production enterprise.

DOUGLAS LAMB: You mention maize seeds. Are there any other types of seed that you are hoping to produce?

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY: Well yes in fact one of the most important projects we have at Bunda is our special variety of bean, which people know as the navy bean, or the pea bean or the canning bean. These are dried beans and we expect to take these, the varieties which our bean project team decide are good formuli, we expect to take these forward until we are actually producing commercial seed for release to farmers on a commercial scale. Then ultimately we will get out of these established varieties and bring forward new varieties.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Amongst the many advantages of the University's College of Agriculture stepping in to fill the gap is that it does not suffer because of the limited extent of the market in Malawi. Douglas Lamb wondered what other advantages the Seed Production Unit at Bunda College has over a normal commercial undertaking.

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY: Well, at the moment the big advantage that Bunda has is that we have twenty staff recruited to teach agriculture who are also skilled in the things they teach. There is thus a resource in Malawi of approximately twenty to twenty-five staff who have the time, the facilities, the resources generally and the knowledge to carry on this kind of work as an integral part of their academic job. In fact, we support a great deal of our research at Bunda from our commercial activities on the farm.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: An added bonus not many University departments are in a position to earn. Like Bortei Dokh in Ghana, Professor Pinney also recognises a strictly academic bonus that the staff themselves are gaining from their direct link with the national economy

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY: We fell very strongly that if we are to do a good job of teaching students who will go out in the agricultural industry to all sorts of jobs, that it is essential that our staff have the opportunity of participating in the extension work which is such an essential part of the development of Malawi.

DOUGLAS LAMB: So there are different spill-over benefits for the teaching and research at Bunda College of Agriculture in this programme.

PROFESSOR T. PINNEY: Quite frankly we wouldn't be fooling with this sort of thing at all if we didn't feel that it had academic value as well as assisting Malawi to develop its own seed production facilities. The provision of seeds which, at the moment, have to be imported for such things as dolichos or glicene or other kinds of tropical legumes including the various possibilities of pasture grasses is so great that we feel that within, certainly within the next decade, that the needs for seeds in Malawi will be large enough to justify internal production rather than importation.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: An encouraging forecast from Professor Pinney, Principal of Bunda College of Agriculture, the University of Malawi - and once again a whole 'University Report' proves that universities are not ivory tower institutions catering for the elite.

BROADCASTING RIGHTS: FREE FOR USE BY
ALL BROADCASTING ORGANISATIONS OUTSIDE
BRITAIN IN ENGLISH OR TRANSLATION.

PUBLICATION RIGHTS: NOT FREE FOR
PUBLICATION OUTSIDE BRITAIN IN ENGLISH
OR ANY OTHER LANGUAGE.