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## OPENING ADDRESS

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I am not sure by what process of reasoning the organisers of this Conference arrived at the conclusion that I would be a suitable person to give the opening address. I have never made claims to understanding Economics, although perhaps this may have been considered an advantage. My only real contact with the world of Agriculture has been a childhood experience of life on a sugar plantation, but I should imagine that in these days of emphasis on diversification of the economy this is hardly a qualification for addressing a group of agricultural economists. However, there seems to be nothing to gain by indulging in speculative analysis of motives. Whatever the reasons for the choice I am happy to have been given the opportunity of bidding welcome to delegates, and in particular to say how honoured we are that the opening session of this important conference is taking place on our University campus.

In accepting the invitation to speak to this assembly I was not however motivated purely by a desire to extend the usual cordialities. It seemed to me that identifying myself in some way with this conference was one way of demonstrating this University's belief in the importance of education to Agriculture, and its willingness to offer its expertise and facilities to help contribute to agricultural development in the Region.

It has been said, and here I quote, that "the agricultural problem will not be solved in a laboratory or at a conference. To get people of our world a decent supply of food will require a gigantic effort. The goal will not be met unless millions of people, technicians, officials, and, above all, farmers, are willing to initiate a radical and often painful process of social change". In less eloquent but perhaps more direct language one might recall the statement attributed to Sir Alexander Bustamante, namely, "Ph.D. can't plant yam." I do not think that the intention of these statements is to belittle the importance of education to agricultural development. No one in his right mind could argue for instance that research does not have a significant role to play. But both these statements in their different ways reflect concern about the type of education that is required to meet the agricultural problems of a developing country. And in a very general way they imply that the sort of education that is needed is one which acts as an instrument of overall change, fashioning not only techniques but attitudes as well.

Recently I came across an item of information that seems to support the contention of the speakers of the above statements. This information referred to the fact that several recent works have emphasized that the economic growth of agriculture requires not only modern factors of production, but modern attitudes, values, motivations, and skills. Perhaps the word modern in our context should be substituted, since it might be construed to mean "western" and hence "foreign". We might in its place insert the word 'new' if only to emphasise that we do not necessarily equate modern with what is imported, and that whatever approaches we adopt must bear relevance to the environment. That being said we are still left with the proposition that some rethinking of our agricultural educational programmes is essential, particularly in respect of the development of proper attitudes, values, and motivations. What exactly is proper can clearly be the subject of debate, and no doubt unanimity on its definition would not be easily attained.

But we can at least start by defining what is not proper, and in this way pinpoint those areas upon which to concentrate our thinking towards change.

I cannot claim the knowledge or experience to say what is proper or not in this context, but since I cannot resist temptation I feel bound to make a few passing observations about the type of things that our educational system should seek to correct, specifically in so far as Agriculture is concerned. And in speaking of education I hasten to explain that my concern is with education as seen in its totality. It is not therefore confined to the formal education in the classroom or the laboratories. It includes the education at work and in the field, and it embraces the education of society as a whole through the various media which influence public opinion.

In as much as formal education in Agriculture is concerned there are signs all over the world that developing countries are beginning to reexamine their systems and to put into effect programmes more relevant to the needs of their society. The importance of middle-level training is being recognised, and even at the level of universities conventional degree programmes are giving way to ones with more practical orientation. These are indeed hopeful signs, but there is one danger we need to guard against in this process of change in agricultural education, and this is an over-emphasis on the vocational mechanics of farming. Whatever the field, education should seek to develop inquiring minds, to inspire confidence in one's abilities, and to inculcate habits of thought and action that are founded on reason. The inevitability of change makes it certain that present vocational practices will go out of date. Education should make allowance for this and try to create the sort of person that can and will adapt to change. This is possible only when the education is of a kind that is designed to give people an appreciation of what the requirements for development are, and is not just a process of indoctrination of robots.

It is not enough however that education should give people the flexibility of mind to respond and adapt to change. There is more in a thinking individual than the mere ability to appreciate the value or otherwise of what is presented to him. The individual must also have the capacity to initiate change, to recognise for himself what requires improvement, and to experiment, however imperfectly, on ways of effecting improvement. This is particularly true in the context of Agriculture, especially when production depends primarily on the efforts of a large number of peasant farmers. Too often it has been thought that the only task of education in respect of farmers is that of conveying new methods and techniques and new results of agricultural research. Important as this is it is equally important that the farmer should himself be in a position, and have the desire, to utilise the rich experience gained in the practical performance of his profession to suggest and attempt new ideas. His education therefore should not be limited to giving him the facility to follow. It should also aim to widen his vision and make him aware of his potential ability to lead. If agricultural development is to accelerate, those who constitute the base of Agriculture, namely the farmers in the field, must see themselves as more than the human equivalent of mechanical devices.

I will not in the short address I have planned for the occasion dwell any longer on the purely formal aspect of agricultural education which is really a topic for consideration on its own. Indeed I would be overstaying my welcome if I did, for I am sure you would all prefer to proceed to the more interesting business of today's programme rather than sit and listen to someone whose only

claim to be addressing you this morning may be likened to the doubtful right of the man who invites you to dinner to bore you with his jokes. So I shall end in passing by referring to two attitudes that seem to me to be in need of change, and which have to be changed if agricultural development in the Region is to progress as rapidly as necessity demands it should.

Firstly people will have to grow to think of farming as an honourable profession. And by people I am not referring only to those who are, or are likely to be, engaged in the practice of farming. I refer to society as a whole. If the field of agriculture is to attract people of talent, people with imagination, then agriculture as a profession, as an occupation, as an enterprise, must have some parity in status with the other professions. I do not think I need to elaborate on this point. We are all of us aware that with but few exceptions, as for instance in universities and research institutions where dignity is accorded the profession, those who take up agriculture as an occupation do so as a last resort after all attempts at securing other options have failed. Most of us too have knowledge, directly or indirectly, of parents reacting with horror to their childrens' contemplation of Agriculture as an occupation or profession. And we are all too familiar with society's general regard of the farmer as the illiterate backwoodsman whose uses have to be recognised but whose presence must only be tolerated.

Secondly, and this is perhaps more relevant to the theme of this conference, people will have to be educated to have confidence in the value of the products of their own society, whether these products are persons or things. It is a fairly natural characteristic of human beings to think that other peoples' goods are better than their own, but one somehow gets the impression that in the Caribbean the "grass is always so much greener on the other side". I cannot pretend to understand the psychological factors responsible for this attitude. It is almost certain that our education, based as it was on external standards and values, deprived us of the will or inclination to develop a confidence in our own things. Whatever the cause the effect is the same, and it is the effect we should all be engaged in changing.

Let me however conclude before I become too controversial, and let me wish you well in your deliberations. As a consumer I appreciate the significance of the theme you have chosen, and as a consumer I hope that the outcome of your discussions will be a translation into action of more effective means of production and distribution. In this respect I leave in your thoughts the story of the rabbit who had become tired of life because of the time he had to spend under cover to avoid men, dogs and other enemies, and so went to consult the owl about his difficulties. The owl listened attentively and then said "I would advise you to make a change. Why not be a weasel?" "Thank you for the suggestion, I'll think it over" said the rabbit. A few days later he returned. "I like your suggestion" he said "and I should be glad if you would kindly tell me how to become a weasel." "Sorry" said the owl, "I can't advise on matters of detail. I only advise on policy."