

I. Livingstone and H.W. Ord, *Agricultural Economics for Tropical Africa*, Heinemann, London, 1981.

There is no dearth of textbooks explaining neoclassical principles of economics in the West. They form the staple for the students and teachers of Africa as well as Asia. To give them a native flavour some shrewd authors give titles like Economics for Third World, Economics for Eastern Africa, Western Africa Economics or even narrow country-specific titles. These textbooks are general textbooks with 'local' examples. If the example drawn is Coffee price for Uganda, it is Copper for Zambia. But Economics is societal and historical and not necessarily universal. Many textbook writers as also the mute consumers of their output, however, treat Economics as if it is based on universal principles. The book under review is no exception from the general run of textbooks available in Africa though this one deals with the applied branch of Agricultural Economics with particular reference to tropical Africa. Indeed economists know too well that product differentiation can come with changes in brand names alone. One is inclined to think this way when one reads some other textbooks by the same authors. Card players know well that with a given packet you can have umpteen combinations.

The book is divided into five parts, viz: economic development, supply and demand, production economics and decision-making, agriculture and marketing and agriculture in development planning. The first three parts covering 13 chapters spanning 177 pages and the last Chapter on 'Agriculture in development planning' (notwithstanding the title) are too general for a book on Agricultural Economics. Only 100 pages out of the three hundred page book are devoted to agriculture in tropical Africa. The theoretical background is too heavy and redundant for the core of the book. The gate is bigger than the house and does not prove utilitarian either.

These authors (like several writers on agricultural economics) have yielded to the temptation of treating the cultivator and his problem of resource acquisition and utilisation on the analogy of the competitive firm. The nature of the economic relationships in agrarian societies (e.g. tribal mode of production in Africa) be far removed from the general theories of economics as expounded in the 14 chapters of this volume. Discerning teachers and students get confused when books like this present theories and proceed to facts which have no bearing on them. (Incidentally I must acknowledge that the first chapters though irrelevant for this work is well written and reveal considerable pedagogical skill and mastery of the subject). There is a reference to share cropping in Chapter 8. But share cropping is not as simple as sharing the marginal product on a fixed ratio between the landlord and tenant. A diagrammatic representation of it adds to elegance, but abstracts from the exploitative relations that existed under the feudal and capitalist modes of production in several parts of the world. In Chapter 9 the authors observe that "(linear programming) has become an essential tool of farm management and agricultural extension services in African countries today". I do not think they are correct. But they proceed "we shall therefore use it to explain how our entrepreneur might endeavour to allocate given resources to produce the optimum combination of crops". (Page 110). The assumptions made have no empirical validity. In Chapter 10 on 'choice of Technique', the author states "Within the category of transport services, squeezing twelve people into a taxi is a popular form of appropriate technology in Africa". (p.127). The teachers of Africa will have to face the challenge of presenting relevant models at a more fundamental level of concepts, categories and the nature of economic relationships rather than copying or modifying neoclassical models.

The four chapters that deal with the facts of agricultural economics besides being general do not do full justice to the topics dealt with. In chapter 14 the characteristics and types of agriculture are catalogued followed by a discussion on the peasant farmer and vent - for - surplus expansion in Uganda and West Africa. From the 'vent' the jump is for a brief discussion on the economics of subsistence agriculture followed by a lengthy discussion on various aspects of Kenyan agriculture. The question of scale economies and the hypothesis that small farms are more efficient in Asian and African agriculture needs discussion and documentation. The fifteenth chapter titled "Topics in Agricultural Development" covers ten topics, viz: the supply response of peasant producers (hardly two pages with little empirical data to prove or disprove anything), income distribution and rural stratification land tenure and land reforms in Africa (less than two pages), transformation versus improvement strategies, approaches to extension, the economics of mechanisation, settlement scheme irrigation, socialist transformation schemes and economics of pastoralism. Most of them are relevant, but a strange assortment to be compressed into a chapter. Chapter 16 opens thus: "Whereas the value of agricultural producers and factory workers is readily appreciated, there is often misunderstanding of the role of traders and middlemen, and of the functions of the marketing system generally" (p.227). I do not think the authors have succeeded in dispelling this misunderstanding either in this chapter or in the one that follows. The structure of marketing, the price spread between consumers and products, how a small number of big buyers exploit the large number of small unorganised peasant producers are not fully brought out in the discussions. While there is a paragraph on UNCTAD, there is none on Lome Convention.

There are serious omissions. Institutional reforms, land reforms in particular, farm production economics, technological change in African agriculture, the economics of peasant farming, food aid and security, agricultural resource use, economics of cropping pattern, farm labour are some of the serious omissions. A casual merit or treatment in a cavalier fashion deserves no praise. It is high time the teachers of agricultural economics collectively or individually address themselves to the challenging task of producing textbooks relevant to the region.

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