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DEARTH OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH DATA IN POLICY MAKING AS DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has embarked on several development journeys without arriving at the desired destinations. Central to this monumental failure is the non-application of scientific research data in the formulation and implementation of development policies and programmes. Thus, successive administrations have not been able to achieve sustainable development in country. The objective of this paper is to show how shortage and poor usage of empirical research data hamper socio-economic development in Nigeria. The study revealed that in Mexico and Tanzania, where evidence-based policy making is encouraged public funds spent on development projects and programmes produced desired outcomes, which were determined before even the design and execution of projects and programmes. This approach to development policy making is lacking in Nigeria. Rather, development policies and programmes, in Nigeria, are based on the "rule of the thumb" and/or felt need or mere assumptions, greatly influenced by political considerations and calculations, hence, the failure of successive governments to deliver real development to the people. Therefore, the paper concluded that to achieve real and sustainable development in Nigeria public officers must rely on scientific research data in policy formulation and implementation. Some of the recommendations are evidence-based policy making approach should be institutionalized in the country and cost-benefit analysis should be made to ascertain/determine the actual impact of government policies, programmes or projected before public funds are deployed on such schemes.

Keywords: Development challenges, Policy making, Scientific Research Data, Programmes, Outcomes, sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

Successive governments in Nigeria have aroused the appetite of the citizenry with the promises of the delivery of development. Consequently, governments over the years have embarked on different "development projects and programmes" to deliver the promised development. However, real development has eluded the people of Nigeria since independence till date. Different scholars and observers have adduced different reasons for the failure of successive governments to bring development to the people. For instance, Ogunmola (2015) posits that over 80 percent of government projects failed in Nigeria despite the incorporation of international expatriates in the execution of such projects. To him the major reason for the failure of government projects and programmes is government's inefficiency and insensitivity. Similarly, Eneh (2011) attributed the failure of development delivery in Nigeria to poor and ineffective implementation of development policies and programmes. Also, Nnabugwu (2015) disclosed that a UNIDO report in 2005 asserts that lack of communication among project/programme managers and designers of such projects/programmes is the main reason for development projects/programmes failure in the country. Nonetheless, to many development practitioners real development is embedded in the practice of sustainable development. Fortunately, to guide the path to sustainable development the United Nations Organization (UNO) and other world leaders have instituted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets for both developed countries and developing countries across the world. This is aimed at ensuring that in improving the living conditions of the present generation that of the future generation is not jeopardized.

Contrary to the above assertions this paper would argue that the principal development challenge in Nigeria is shortage and/or deliberate none utilization of scientific research data by public office holders. The objective of this paper is to show how shortage and poor usage of empirical research data hamper socio-economic development and sustainable development in Nigeria. The rest of the paper would be developed under the following headings: the concept of scientific research data, meaning of development and sustainable development, development challenges in Nigeria, the Nigerian experience with development delivery, need for empirical research data in development and sustainable development, and conclusion and recommendation.

THE CONCEPT OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH DATA

Scientific research data refers information arrived at following a systematic scientific method of inquiry on a particular subject matter. Generally, research means creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge or discover new information about a phenomenon, including knowledge of humans, culture and society, and the utilization of this body of knowledge to create new applications (OECD, 2002). According to Vellino (2010) scientific research data is without any doubt a central component in the life circle of knowledge production. It serves as the major ingredient in the formulation of theories and in the designing of development policies and programmes.

For a set of data to be described as scientific the process leading to their gathering or acquisition must be systematized. In other words, a problem must be identified a step-by-step approach designed to elicit the relevant information on the problem(s) and systematically analyzed to reach definitive results or conclusions. Such results are factual or empirical and express the true position of things, and not merely imagined views or concocted ideas.

MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The term development means a wide range of things depending on the context it is used by the user. Scholars have agreed that development is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. However, most social scientists hold the view that development must be people/human centered. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seems to agree with the view that human beings should be the central focus of real development efforts when it argued that people are the real wealth of a nation, therefore the basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives and must be judged by the extent to which it promotes the human good (Harry, 2009). Similarly, Seer (1967) posits that, any talk about development should expressly answer the questions: what is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment? And what is happening to inequality? Still assessing the centrality of people to development, Angaye (1995) stated thus:

"... Development should, therefore, be seen as improvement in the material, physical, mental, spiritual, and moral quality of life resulting from rising incomes, the reduction or eradication of poverty, unemployment, unjustified inequalities, provision of better food, shelter, health, education and protection, high self-esteem or respect, increased form of choice and ability to determine one's own destiny...".

Consequently, Kalagbor (2012) concludes that, every development plan, policy, project or programmes must seek to raise the standard of living of the people, eradicate or reduce to the bearest minimum poverty, unemployment and inequality, which are the three main development indicators. As earlier noted, development is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted and this has given rise to different perspectives to the analysis and discussion of the phenomenon. Hence there are economic, political, social, cultural technological perspectives and so on.

Sustainable development like development has been variously defined by scholars based on their understating of the concept. However, the most acceptable definition is the one contained in the Brundtland Report, commonly tagged "our common future".

The International Institute for Sustainable Development citing the Brundtland Report of 1987, described sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The reason for sustainable development is to ensure a situation whereby people living in societies in which their means of livelihood is guaranteed at all times, and resources to be used continue to meet their present needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system for future generations. Sustainable development has the objective of promoting sustainable progress and eliminating inequalities in human societies around the world.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

The development challenges facing Nigeria are numerous and multi-sectoral. Indeed, Nigeria is in dare need of development in all the sectors and across the nation. While it is true that the development challenges cut across all sectors across the country, in this work we shall focus mainly on infrastructure, education and health.

The development challenge in Nigeria is most visible on the issue of poor and decaying infrastructure. In Nigeria, there is a very serious infrastructural problem in the areas of telecommunication, railway, roads, airports, electricity, etc. A

comparison of the infrastructural profile of some selected developing nations would show the extent of infrastructure deficit in Nigeria. Interestingly, these countries either have similar development potentials with Nigeria or had comparable macro-economic indicators prior to the 1980s. At present these countries have achieved tremendous infrastructural development when compared with Nigeria. Obviously, there are no scientific research data in Nigeria to quantitatively and qualitatively improve on her infrastructural base to enhance the quality of life the citizenry. Below is a table showing the state of infrastructure of the selected developing countries as at 2009.

Table 1: Infrastructural Profile of Selected Developing Countries as at 2009

Country	Population	Area	Stock of Infrastructure				
	Million	(Km ²)	Telecoms	Rail	Roads	Airports	Electricity
			(Million	(Km)	(Km)		Generation
			lines)				(MW)
Nigeria	152.21	923,768	64.27	4,500	193,200	22	3,000
South Africa	49.10	1,219,090	50.75	20,872	362,099	147	50,229
Malaysia	28.27	329,847	34.68	1,849	98,721	38	25,000
Brazil	179.10	8,514,877	191.78	28,857	1,751,868	718	86,020
Turkey	96.81	783,562	83.32	8,697	426,951	90	18,900
India	1,166.08	3,287,263	464.84	63,327	3,316,425	251	76,170
South Korea	48.64	99,720	67.22	3,381	103,029	72	80,000

Source: NISER (2011) Medium-Term (2011 – 2015) Strategic Plan, Research for

Nigeria's Social and Economic Transformation. P.9

The table above shows that Nigeria with its 152.21 million people generates about 3,000 Mega watts of electricity and has 22 airports, while South Africa with its 49.10 million people generates 50,229 mega watts of electricity and has 147 airports, and South Korea with a population of 48.64 million people generates 80,000 mega watts of electricity and has 72 airports. Power and airports are very critical to manufacturing and export trade, which are central to industrialization. It is not surprising therefore that these countries are very successful in their industrialization strategy of development. Obviously there is gross inadequacy of infrastructure in Nigeria to drive development, especially, industrial development. As Seth Suhel has argued, any nation that does not invest in infrastructure will choke the arteries of progress in its economy (BBC News, 2012). The infrastructure deficit challenge was expressed by Mr. Demola Adegbusi, Business Manager Construction and Infrastructure of First Bank of Nigeria, at the third Free Trade Zones (FTZs) Annual Conference held recently in Lagos (Osagie, 2012). Adegbusi asserts:

We are concerned with infrastructure development in the areas of power, roads, rail and seaports... Our concern was borne out of the realization that it poses a major challenge and that there was need to create rich players in these areas, people with requisite experience and skills to focus on infrastructure development in Nigeria.

In the area of health care delivery the challenges are enormous. There is an obvious case of policy failure and incoherent policy in this regard. This has resulted in gross inadequacy of qualified health care personnel and facilities in the

countries. Consequently, most Nigerians, especially those in the low-income bracket, are forced to depend on magic, superstition and herbal preparations of dubious efficacy as alternatives to modern medicine (ASUU, 2002 and Harry, 2012). Worst still is the non-availability of empirical research data showing disease prevalence by states/regions. Similarly, with respect to education the story is not different. Ojo (1986) argued that the pattern of manpower development in Nigeria has failed to achieve desirable levels of manpower mixes, not only in terms of categories, but also in terms of quality. This view was supported by Gbosi (2003) when he posited that Nigeria's educational structure depicts the dominance of formal education and places less emphasis on vocational and other training that would impact skills in Nigeria. The corollary is that the nation's institutions of higher learning turnout thousands of liberal arts graduates annually, who are not in high demand in the nation's labour market and beyond. In addition, a group of experts in a seminar disclosed that Nigeria is one of the countries having the highest number of illiterates in the world. Similarly, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director and country representative at the seminar opined that, "there are about 60 million adults in Nigeria, 85 percent of them under the age of 35 years, who can neither read nor write" (Harry, 2010). The Nigerian government has over years acknowledged that the nation's educational sector is in serious crisis, but has failed to carry out scientific study of the situation so as to proffer systematic solution to the problem. This, no doubt is a major development challenge in the country.

DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES: THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

As earlier noted, successive regimes in Nigeria have embarked on different projects and programmes intended to delivery development to the people. However, these projects and programmes are not essentially premised on evidence from scientific research data, hence development delivery in the country had been elusive thereby making the efforts of government amounting to nothing. Most often the government has not carried out empirical studies of the matter/situation for which it is designing development projects or programmes on; and where such scientific research data exist, the government is not interested in using such data as a guide in the design of its policies and programmes. All of these have denied Nigerians the much needed development in the country. For instance, a study conducted by Michael Lipton in 1980 revealed that development efforts in Nigeria was "urban bias", to the neglect of the rural areas and this was the bane of the development processes in Nigeria. Observers have argued that the major reason for high cost of food in Nigeria today (2016/2017) was largely due to disconnect between federal government/Abuja and the rural areas as a result of lack of empirical data or refusal to use available data. Hence the 2016 budget provisions were targeted at the urban centres to the neglect of the rural areas. Consequently, roads that will take farm products (food and industrial products) from the farms where they were produced to the markets and other places where they are needed were in state of despair. The government of the day does not have clear picture of the situation because no scientific study has been carried out in this regard; rather a committee set up by the government to investigate reasons for the high cost of food in the country blamed the police, Army and Customs to be responsible for this.

In Nigeria, development policies and programmes are designed using the "rule of the thumb", and/or felt need or mere assumptions of what should be done. They are usually not guided by scientific research data or findings. Thus, it is difficult to measure the level of success/achievement of goals, impact on the people or economy in general and areas of deviation when it occurs to apply control measures to get back on course. For instance, no scientific study was done to establish/determine what is the energy need of the country and what can be done to achieve that or what is required to achieve that in terms of human and material resources required for execution. Therefore, it is not surprising that the

Obasanjo government spent over \$16 billion dollars on National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) between 2000 and 2007, without any remarkable improvement in the power supply situation in the country. Successive governments after Obasanjo regime have also spent billions of dollars on the power sector without quantifiable increase or improvement in power supply situation.

Similarly, in the area of health care delivery, as earlier stated, no government in the country has carried out disease prevalence study, identify and collate the number of specialized medical personnel and how they are deployed across the country. Indeed, there is no directory of professionals in the different fields of medicine. Hence, health care delivery in the country is at its lowest ebb. It is not surprising to see the political class and their associates travel abroad, even to India, for the least of ailment to seek for medical attention. By such actions the leaders of the country have left Nigerians to their fate with regard to health care delivery. During the military takeover of power in December 1983, Brigadier General Sani Abacha, who announced the coup, claimed that our hospitals were now mere consulting centres, but the Abacha became the Head of State from November 1993 to June 1998, and at the time of this death on 8th June 1998 our hospitals have degenerated from mere consulting centres to mortuaries (Harry, 2010).

Finally, on education, the story is not different. Successive regimes have talked about the falling standard of education in the country, however, no effort has been made by any government to scientifically study the situation to determine the actual reasons for the fall in standards and possibly proffer systematic solution to the problem in a sustainable manner. For instance, since the year 2001 various international educational agencies and the Nigerian government have been talking of over 10 million out-school children in the North. The figure had remained the same for over 10 years (no increase and no reduction), till 2011 when President Goodluck Jonathan became the President. Apparently, without any scientific study the government of Jonathan attempted to address the problem by building the almajiri school system across the northern states. Today, it is difficult to measure the level of success of the almajiri school system in solving the out-school children problem in the north.

The non-availability of scientific research data is not limited to the out-school children problem in the North, but could be seen in the various sub-sectors of education industry in the country. For instance, the issue of non-classification of any Nigerian University as one of the world's first 1000 universities is a big insult to a nation as populated as Nigeria and self-acclaimed giants of Africa; the inability to establish a world class tertiary institutions in the country to absorb the teeming youths seeking higher education, and so on. Yet, the government continues to under fund education in the country. Indeed, in the history of Nigeria no government has attained the UNESCO minimum benchmark of 26 percent of annual budget to education. No doubt, if educational policies and programmes of the government in the country are guided by empirical research data, they would have more significant effect that are measurable and verifiable.

NEED FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH DATA IN DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The need for empirical research data in development policies and programmes formulation and implementation need not be over-emphasized. Indeed, in development policy and programme formulation and execution, scientific research data are highly needed to make informed decisions. Empirical research data are facts discovered or established from scientific studies. Indubitably, facts are different from fictions or conjectures.

In literature, the act of policy design based on facts is called evidence-based policy. Evidence-based policy is public policy formed on account of rigorously established objectives. It helps to identify programmes and practices capable of improving policy-relevant outcomes. According to Banks (2009), while it is true that evidence-based policy making can be traced back to the 14th century, it was more recently popularized by the Blair Government in the United Kingdom. The Blair Government white paper published in 1999 titled "Modernising Government", stated that "government must produce policies that really deal with problems, that are forward-looking and shape by evidence (empirical research data) rather than a response to short-term pressures (conjectures/fictions), that tackle causes not symptoms". It is worthy of note that in modern times evidence-based policy making is associated with Adrian Smith because in his 1996 Presidential address to the Royal Statistical Society, he questioned the process of policy making and urged for more evidence-based approach stating that it has valuable lessons to offer."

Certainly, empirical research data guided policies are of immense importance to socio-economic development in many ways. Hyder et al (2010) noted that empirical data guidance constitute key strategies for improving uptake of evidence into policy, including improving the technical capacity of policy makers, better packaging of research findings, use of social networks, establishment of fora to assist in linking evidence with policy outcomes. On the other hand, Carden (2011) observed that empirical research data can contribute to better governance in at least three ways: by encouraging open inquiry and debate, by empowering people with the knowledge to hold governments accountable, and by enlarging the array of policy options and solutions available to the policy process. Similarly, Scott (2005), emphasizing the importance of empirical research data in development policy processes stated that statistics play a vital role in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PROGRESA, which is Programme of the Mexican Federal Government launched in 1998. According to him, the aim of the programme is to reduce poverty by offering financial incentives (cash transfers) to poor rural households to invest in their children's human capital development (health care and education). Scott disclosed that the programme had such a monumental success that PROGRESA was not only maintained by the next government headed by President Vincente Fox but was extended to the urban areas in 2001 – 2002. He posited that such act of continuity in policy between successive regimes was unprecedented in Mexico.

In Tanzania, available information shows how empirical data-based reallocation of existing public sector resources, supplemented by minimal additional funds, had a major impact on health care delivery outcomes in the short and medium-term. Commenting on the importance of empirical research data guided development project in the health care delivery system in Tanzania, Scott (2005) wrote:

"For public health expenditure to have the greatest impact on reducing mortality and disability, information is required about which diseases have the greatest impact on the health status of a population (disease burden) and how health speeding is allocated to combat different diseases (expenditure mapping). In the mid 1990s rural districts in Tanzania lacked both kinds of information. Most people died at home rather than in clinics or hospitals, so were excluded from the official morbidity data, while district health budgets might include more than 1,000 expenditure items which made it difficult to identify the pattern of spending across diseases. The result of such ignorance was often a huge mismatch between the burden of disease and the allocation of health expenditure. In one

district, malaria accounted for 30 percent of years of life lost, but received only 5 percent of health spending in 1996. Conversely, tuberculosis which was responsible for loss than 4 percent of years of life lost, attracted 22 percent of expenditure."

However, the story changed when health care delivery projects were based on empirical research data in Tanzania. Using the Tanzania Essential Health Intervention Project (TEHLP) survey results, drawn from two districts (Morogoro and Rufiji), the pattern of health care spending was altered to provide a closer match with the disease burden (Scott, 2005). According to Scott (2005), by re-allocating health care expenditure and an additional spending of US \$0.86 dollar per head in the two districts between 1999 and 2000, infant mortality in Rufiji declined by 28 percent and mortality among children below five years fell by 14 percent. In addition, within a four year period (1997/98 – 2001/2002) the mortality rate of children below five years dropped by 43 percent in Morogoro, while in Rufiji it fell by 46 percent between 1999/2000 and 2002/2003.

The need for empirical research data in sustainable development policies and programmes design and implementation is so overwhelming and compelling. Agricultural Information Management Standards (2016) observed that, the reason why development sustainability is hampered in many African states is that policy-makers have failed to appreciate the role of scientific research data and innovation in transforming the continent. As earlier noted, scientific knowledge can support translation of target to national policies and help measure and evaluate impact on individuals and the society at large. It has been observed that achieving sustainable development in Nigeria has been difficult because most policy decisions in the country are not based on empirical research findings. Hence, implementation of such policies and programmes fail to capture areas of using science, technology and innovation for transformation and sustainability.

The non-application of scientific research data in sustainable development policy design and implementation is most evident in power generation (energy sector), urban development, and education and health care services. For instance, there is a drastic fall in the standard of education in the country today when compared with 1970s and 1980s, as attested to by many educationists. Similarly, in the 1970s and 1980s the public power supply situation in the country was such that many industrial concerns operated without alternative sources of power. However, by the late 1990s to date it is impossible for any business that needs power to operate in the country depending on public power supply. This means there was no application of scientific research data or the policy makers and managers of public affairs over the years failed to apply scientific knowledge in projecting the future power/energy needs of the future generation in the country in their development policy design and implementation. This has significantly hampered the industrialization process and socio-economic development of the country. Obviously, there is a serious need for much enhanced harnessing of both science and technology for sustainable development (STCMG, 2016), anywhere in the world including Nigeria.

Indeed, empirical research data guided development policies, programmes or projects have always recorded remarkable success as has been demonstrated in this section. Therefore, policy makers are strongly advised to embark on scientific research of the problems they seek to find solution to, so as to acquire/secure the policy relevant information to guide the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Successive Nigerian governments over the years have embarked on various development projects and programmes to bring development to the citizenry. Yet delivery of real development has remained elusive. Different scholars and observers have attributed the failure of the government to delivery real development in the country to a number of factors, mainly, inefficiency and insensitivity. Obviously, Nigeria is in dare need of sustainable development and the development challenges of the country are enormous. The government has failed in its efforts to develop the country because of the neglect of scientific research data in the design and implementation of development policies and programmes in a sustainable manner. Basically, successive governments in Nigeria use the "rule of the thumb" and/or felt need for more assumptions of what should be done in the design and implementations of development policies and programmes. Scientific research data guided development policies are significant in many ways and guarantee development sustainability. For instance, it provides step-by-step guide from policy formulation to execution, with specific outcome and time frame determined. To achieve real and sustainable development in Nigeria, public officers must rely on scientific research data in policy formulation and implementation. This has been experimented in Mexico and Tanzania, with unequivocal results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

- (a) Evidence-based policy making approach should be institutionalized in all spheres of government activities in the country.
- (b) Government should de-emphasis political considerations or calculations in policy formulation and implementation.
- (c) Cost-benefit analysis should be made to ascertain/determine the actual impact of government policies, programmes or projects before public funds are deployed on such schemes.

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