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Beyond the Truth:
Limitations in Social Science Research from a Development Perspective in Africa

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Abstract

Enhancing development largely hinges on research. Researchers particularly social scientists have faced a number of challenges in their attempt to arrive at and get the truth and facts. Much more is in developing countries where challenges of development are far too many than solutions. It is the purpose of this paper to expose the limitations that social scientists have to grapple with and offers some ways of circumventing these challenges as researchers attempt to identify, and analyse development issues in Africa.

Introduction

In the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the public is getting more disappointed given the plethora of problems that bedevil human survival. Much disappointment has been in developing counties after the so-called end of colonisation brought much expectation for the betterment of the general public. The public are and seem less and less inclined to believe in the value of empirical analysis as a guide to action, when social science research has a mandate to dramatically shape public policy, both directly and indirectly. There is a general consensus regarding the lack of tools for social science to understand the processes generated by globalisation, which in turn result in problems that researchers and policymakers must quickly respond to. Thus a number of challenges have since emerged that limit the social scientists' scope of research. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to examine these challenges and establish the extent that they affect the establishment of truths.

The Emergence of Social Science Research

The social sciences are a group of academic disciplines that study human aspects of the world. They diverge from the arts and humanities in that the social sciences tend to emphasize the use of the scientific method in the study of humanity, including quantitative and qualitative methods.The social sciences, in studying subjective, inter-subjective and objective or structural aspects of society, are sometimes referred to as soft sciences. This is in contrast to hard sciences which may focus exclusively on objective aspects of nature.Social scientists engage in research and theorize about both group and individual behaviors.(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Science)

It must be noted that in ancient philosophy, there was no difference between mathematics and the study of history, poetry or politics. Thus, Aristotle, the great philosopher who lived 384-322 BC studied planetary motion and poetry with the same methods, and Plato 427-347 BC mixed geometrical proofs with his demonstration on the state of intrinsic knowledge. (Ibid) The revolution in science came with the work of Isaac Newton 1653-1727 AD in physics through revolutionising natural philosophy and changed the basic framework of understanding what was deemed scientific.In the 19th century, through the thinking of Auguste Comte 1797-1857 ideas were envisaged as pass through stages vis Theological, Philosophical and Scientific and providing the methodological underpinnings, the first being rooted in assumption, the second in critical thinking, and the third in positive observation. Karl Marx was one of the first writers to claim that his methods of research represented a scientific view of history in this model.(Ibid).

With the late 19th century, attempts to apply equations to statements about human behavior became increasingly common. Among the first were the "Laws" of philology, which attempted to map the change over time of sounds in a language.(Ibid) A number of philosophers and scientists that followed tried to follow the same trend, the work of Darwin on descriptive version of social theory, Freud's theory of the functioning of the mind, and James' work on experimental psychology.

In the first half of the twentieth century, statistics became a free-standing discipline of applied mathematics. Statistical methods were used confidently, for example in an increasingly statistical view of biology.(Ibid). With the rise of the idea of quantitative measurement in the physical sciences, the stage was set for the conception of the humanities as being precursors to social science.

Criticism on the separation of the field has continued,

> *The range of critiques begin from those who believe that the physical sciences are qualitatively different from social sciences, through those who do not believe in statistical science of any kind, through those who disagree with the methodology and kinds of conclusion of social science, to those who believe the entire framework of scientificizing these disciplines is solely, or mostly, from a desire for prestige and to alienate the public.*(Ibid)

What has remained is that the social sciences are sometimes criticized as being less scientific than the natural sciences, in that they are seen as being less rigorous or empirical in their methods. This claim is most commonly made when natural sciences are compared to social sciences in fields such as physics, chemistry or biology in which direct experimentation and falsification of results is generally carried out in a more direct fashion. Social scientists however, argue against such claims by pointing to the use of a rich variety of scientific processes, mathematical proofs, and other methods in their professional literature. Others, however argue that the social world is much too complex to be studied as one would study static molecules. The actions or reactions of a molecule or chemical substance are always the same when placed in certain situations. Humans, on the other hand, are much too complex for these traditional scientific methodologies. Humans and society do not have certain rules that always have the same outcome and they cannot guarantee to react the same way to certain situations.(Ibid).

Despite the concerns what still remains is that there is usually a trade-off between the number of cases and the number of their variables that social research can study. Qualitative research usually involves few cases with many variables, while quantitative involves many phenomena with few variables.(ibid). Some researchers argue that combining the two approaches is beneficial and helps build a more complete picture of the social world, while other researchers believe that the epistemologies that underpin each of the approaches are so divergent that they cannot be reconciled within a research project.(Ibid) As such, quantitative methods becomes useful for describing social phenomena, especially on a larger scale wile qualitative methods allow social scientists to provide richer explanations and descriptions of social phenomena, frequently on a smaller scale. By using two or more approaches researchers may be able to 'triangulate' their findings and provide a more valid representation of the social world. (Ibid)

The Emerging Limitations

Facts and Values

At a popular level there is most probably the oversupply of crude information about social science issues, and facts are much more difficult to establish. A major problem is the deficiency of reliable source material. Much of government business and transactions done on behalf of the public is regularly shrouded in ambiguity.

Statesmen and civil servants are introverted from revealing what they know by the Official Secrets Act, and even when they are not so constrained their memories may be at fault, or, worse, their diaries and personal records may have been written with half an eye on later publication. (John C. Garnett: 104). Apart from the fact that official documents are usually classified until they are no longer controversial, they sometimes disappear without a trace, and, when published, may distort the truth or, by their

selectivity, fail to reveal all of it. What is more, in the age of the telephone, some important material never gets written down at all. (John C. Garnett: 104).

The social scientist will never have at his disposal sufficient evidence to give a definitive answer to the questions. Different historians see the same things in different ways because they are products of their age and the societies in which they live. They cannot escape the values, ideas and language of the age and society into which they were born. Hence, all the history which they write is contemporary history in the sense that whatever they write about is interpreted in the light of the present, and all the history which they write is parochial history in the sense that it reflects the ideas and values of the society into which they were born. (Ibid 106).

According to H.E. Carr (1964:23)

> *"Facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in… By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants."*

Instead one must recognise that 'there are no such things as "facts". There are only messages filtered through a changeable value system (K.E. Boulding 1961:14). It is probably a mistake to speak of 'facts' independently of those who study them. The historian does not study 'facts' he studies his 'facts'. In international politics, the so-called 'facts' are really no more than the personal selections and plausible constructions of historians who, in recreating the past, are engaged in an imaginative venture more akin to that of a creative writer than a scientific reporter. (John C. Garnett, Opicit: 106)

Facts crumble as easily as theories and, philosophically speaking, are indistinguishable from them. In the social sciences there is no safe, reassuring ground where we can pause and confidently take our bearings. (John C. Garnett, Opicit: 107) No one is suggesting that there is no such thing as historical truth only that the reality is flesh and blood social scientist never knows it. Most are agreeable to David Easton (1964:221) when he says, 'facts and values are logically heterogeneous', but that does not mean that in practice they can be separated. There is no such thing as a piece of purely factual analysis, because 'values, not only provide the matrix which shapes the selection of an empirical problem for investigation. (Ibid: 108)

The limitations imposed by one's value system are as inescapable as those imposed by the genetic make-up of one's parents, but there is still plenty of scope for individual thought and development. Social scientist need to be aware of two sets of values their own and those of the scholars whose works they are studying. At most every individual spends time refining self-awareness about values. In essence values sound warning bells in the sense that their existence alert us to the limited applicability of a piece of

research, and to the fact that we may have been blinded to certain aspects of the investigation. (John C. Garnett, Opicit)

The values implicit in the literature of 'peace research' are quite different, but equally distinctive. (Ibid: 110) Peace researchers tend to be fairly optimistic about the prospects for saving the world; indeed most of their writing is specifically directed towards that goal. (Ibid) In the social sciences investigators bring to their work whole bundles of idiosyncratic values and attitudes, which, in addition to shaping their choice of research subject, may also shape their analysis of it in quite distinctive ways. (John C. Garnett, Opicit: 111).

One must stress the fact that social scientists and policymakers still act primarily along paths that are not only independent, but also contradictory. It is important to highlight that there is criticism of investigations far removed from reality and which do not address the requirements of the current situation.

Conceptual limitation

Conceptual analysis is important because it offers some prospect of reducing this confusion and misunderstanding which bedevils certain issues. But it demands a degree of awareness about language, which does not come naturally to us. Most people use words quite unreflectively, (Ibid: 116) which often distorts the meaning.

One of the most daunting tasks in social science research is trying to find the meaning of words. Scientists are directed towards the fruitful activity of exploring the various ways in which, over the years, particular expressions have been used. (Ibid). This creates the problem of arriving at what might be acceptable truth. In political science for instance there are so many slippery concepts that minds rarely meet. The spotlight has recently focused on 'rights', but more fundamental concepts like 'liberty', 'freedom', 'power', 'order' and 'justice' are used in equally diverse and confusing ways. (Ibid: 114)

Gallie has identified a class of concepts, which he describes as 'essentially contested', that is to say, a class of concepts, which, by their very nature, lead to endless disputes about their proper uses. (Ibid). It appears in social science, interpretation may prevail over another in the sense of being more popular or more fashionable in current usage, but it is very difficult to prove that one view is superior or better than another. (Ibid: 115)

Most essentially contested concepts in social science are usually 'cluster concepts' (concept invented by William Connolly to describe complicated concepts which contain a whole cluster of subordinate, but equally complex, ideas). This creates problems as phrases can only be properly understood by reference to yet more ideas and concepts of equal complexity, (Ibid: 116), which further complicates issues and clarity.

There has been an argument that conceptual analysis cannot solve any practical problems and has led to the accusation that it is a trivial activity as academics would play around with the meaning of words rather than addressing central issues that are pertinent to development. It is important to highlight that such an accusation, though understandable, is misguided. According to Garnett J. C.

> *In a crisis we all sympathise with the person who says, 'don't just stand there; do something.' But 'doing something' only makes sense if you know what to do; and knowing what to do comes only to those who have given some thought to the problem.*

Even those who can appreciate the value of conceptual analysis as an approach to the study of social sciences particularly, politics may be perplexed as to how it can be taught. For the social scientist it has to be understood "the beliefs, myths, images and ideas that alone give meaning to human activity, are the very stuff of his subject; they are the 'facts' of social life, data which he must appreciate if he is to understand the vagaries of human behaviour." (Ibid: 122)

The task of a social scientist is therefore to become clear about the ambiguities of political concepts. By learning the logical geography of central political expressions, a social scientist from early years equips him/herself with the tools of his trade. Though conceptual analysis leaves the world as it is, a social scientist has taken the first step along the road of understanding vast array of issues in social science research and has improved chances of understanding the problems of bedevilling the society.

Technical limitations

These limitations pertain to technical difficulties in collecting data on human activity. An important step is selecting an appropriate means of collecting data. There is always lack confidence that the results can be the expectations of the researchers. Thus questions often arise as to the lack of control in social science as it applies to researchers as well as the technique they use.

At times questions are attuned and asked in altered manner. According to Shipman (1988:164) bias enters observations and the personal feelings of the researcher influence the data recorded. Other technical issues pertains to data sought disregarding the rights of others-giving away confidences, reporting illegal practices, obtaining information by fraud and breaking promised anonymity.

The profession typically rewards research that is published in highly technical forums rather than in easily communicated language designed to reach wider audiences. It seems that only social scientists that are popular in certain fora can afford to write in a more popular vein. This often results in the dearth of experts who are also effective communicators, leading to failure of comprehension of the issues which in turn lead to increasing numbers of the public and politicians turning to "simplistic nostrums for "easy" solutions."(George Galster, http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=306772

In some instances there are areas of investigation as yet unexplored, even though they involve problems that are a priority for our societies. Even if political decision makers generated the specific demand, social science does not include these priorities in its agenda, for reasons such as a legitimate need for autonomous research or a lack of adequate funding, but also due to differences in timeframes between the academic and political worlds. *(*www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp)

One other issue that constitutes technical limitations is a certain distrust of politics in the academic world. This lack of trust does not prevent social scientists from making demands on policy from a dogmatic perspective that precludes dialogue. (www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp)

Organizational limitations

There are personal, professional and political hopes of researchers that influence the choice of topics, the way it is organised and the results are interpreted. Researchers work within communities that have established traditions and maintain these through managing the rewards available to the ambitions and the funds for research. These communities and organisations have a great bearing on the choice of topics and lines of arguments deemed to be acceptable. It even follows that publications or discussions of certain issues are acceptable in some quarters being denied in some leading to narrow representation of research findings damaging innovativeness for the benefit of the entire society. It is important that communities, countries and organisations move further beyond ideological underpinnings that influence negatively on research.

Political views are influential in all social researchers. It is not wrong to admit the rejection of a neutral observer. The attempt therefore is not to study the condition but acting to improve the situation. It has to be that legitimate social science can, and should provide higher standards of objectivity and methodological soundness than those of advocacy research. Advocacy research attempts to mimic certain features of social science, such as the use of theory and statistical techniques, but fails to be genuinely objective. This is primarily because, whether based on liberal or conservative ideology or simply arising out of a particular cause not linked to any ideology, advocacy research starts out with a firmly held position rather than with a potentially rejectable hypothesis. Such research looks for those facts and theories that bolster its position, finding reasons to reject those that fail to support it. (George Galster, http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=306772)

A substantial amount of applied social science has for some time been commissioned and funded by governments and special interests who often keenly hope for a particular outcome. Even supposedly non-partisan think tanks and universities have not remained untainted by special interest groups that may supply research funds. (Ibid) Under such conditions, the temptations for bias may be enormous. Seasoned social scientists can typically identify research findings that may have been influenced by the sponsor and interpret them accordingly. Other users of research often cannot. This is the case of news

media, for example, which may not have the time or ability to judge the soundness of scientific evidence on all sides of an issue. (Ibid) These also act as sources of information for conceptualising problems for research as well as evidence for certain propositions. No wonder why where there is heavy polarisation of the media the public will blindly follow, and so does academics.

General Policy limitations

At the end of everything decisions have to be made but there is always lack of information to buttress relevance of these decisions. When the political climate is sensitive to do a certain line of inquiry, it is often difficult for the social science researchers to come up with objective policy decisions. Generally, sensitive issues are not for grabs and discussion especially in Africa were demands for openness is largely restricted by certain policy measures that guard secrets.

As such, a host of underhand dealings, corruption among key figures, negative campaign tactics, and the media's emphasis on the personal foibles of candidates for political office taints the whole policy-making process making research for positive transformation of people's lives very difficult to realise. However, money and special interests are directly tied to the policy process and, as such, can have a significant impact on policy research. If in the foreseeable future campaign financing undergoes only rhetorical rather than actual reform, and the influence of the well-heeled special interests continues unabated, policy research will be confronted by two growing obstacles. (George Galster, http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=306772)

Special interests will further corrupt social science by sponsoring more "advocacy research," an exercise in creating political ammunition by selectively culling or distorting information to support pre-ordained conclusions. In such an environment of defensive public policy, it is likely that financial or political support for the public sponsorship of policy research will diminish, and less notice will be paid to evidence produced by social scientists concerning the effects of public programs. (Ibid). But given the lack of the public's control of budgets and the general economic conditions and financial well being of the academics for developing countries, the challenge will largely feature. In actual fact, according to RSNZ,

> *A challenge for new and emerging social science researchers is one of establishing a career path. There is no clear direction for young social science researchers, compensation is low, and the value of social science researchers is often ranked a distant … as a result, fewer students are attracted to the social science researchers role. (*http://www.rsnz.org)

At the same time, it may be unrealistic to expect states themselves to be able to evaluate their experiments in a way that will be meaningful across states. Many state agencies either lack policy evaluation and research divisions altogether. The quantity and quality of many state-initiated evaluations

of state-sponsored programs may thus prove problematic. The inability to adequately test these state experiments will surely inhibit development of program enhancements and may ultimately erode political support for them. (Ibid)

Normally, knowledge is not taken into account by policymakers or is only partially or marginally considered. This exposes the skepticism with which policy decision-makers look at the results produced by social science. As a result of requests and demands with very short deadlines, policy makers have serious difficulties using research, which responds to a completely different timeframe. (www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp)

At most, according to UNESCO, the demands of the electoral calendar, as well as the communication requirements imposed by global political culture, represent obstacles to the use of scientific research and raises the question of the political sustainability of technical decisions and research results. (www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp)

Ethical Considerations

Two main assumptions of the ethics in social science research are voluntary participation and no harm to subjects. There are six key principles of ethical research that the ESRC expects to be addressed, whenever applicable: research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality; research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Some variation is allowed in very specific and exceptional research contexts for which detailed guidance is provided in the policy guidelines; the confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected; research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion; harm to research participants must be avoided and that the independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.(http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf).
Scientific institutions are supposed to comply with ethical norms, and to respect the freedom of scientists to express themselves on ethical issues and to denounce misuse or abuse of scientific or technological advances. Governments and non-governmental organizations, in particular scientific and scholarly organizations, organise debates, including public debates, on the ethical implications of scientific work.
Research into vulnerable populations like refugees, some of whom might be engaged in illegal or semi-illegal activities, raises many ethical problems. The political and legal marginality of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons means that they have few rights and are vulnerable to arbitrary action on the part of state authorities, and sometimes even the international relief community. In conflict zones, or in situations of state collapse, few authorities are willing to protect refugees from those who may do them harm, including researchers whose action may have less than ideal outcomes (Jacobson and Landau 2002: 187 in Jacobsen, K. and Landau, L. 2003).

It is obvious that the relationships between the researcher and the researched in such stressed contexts are likely to be asymmetrical, and that this is indeed likely to have an impact both on the welfare of participants and the veracity of findings. Still, these kinds of considerations are notably absent from reported studies conducted amongst disadvantaged populations (Jacobson and Landau 2002 in Jacobsen, K. and Landau, L. 2003).

To be sure, most research conducted on vulnerable communities comes with an obligation to provide data that may ameliorate problems and guide policy. Though a great number of studies are initiated with reciprocal arrangements that provide opportunities for researchers from developing countries, Benetar points out,

> '*While researchers are generally privileged people, many research subjects are among the most vulnerable in our world, living in the worst conditions of deprivation and exploitation… [and hence] appreciation of concerns regarding research in developing countries requires some knowledge of the growing global disparities in wealth and health, and of the lifestyle and worldview of potential research subjects'* (Benetar 2002: 1131).

It has become often difficult to carry out research in some areas that are pertinent and can address some problems bedevilling Africa. In some areas of research it is very difficult to obtain the truth if ethical issues are observed. For example as Jacobsen and Landau (2002, 187), have noted,

> *'…That much of the current research on forced migration is based on unsound methodology, and that the data and subsequent policy conclusions are often flawed or ethically suspect… humanitarian studies in general reveal a paucity of good social science, are rooted in a lack of rigorous conceptualisation and research design, weak methods and a general failure to address the ethical problems of researching vulnerable communities.*

Though observing ethics is of importance, there has been a tendency by scientists from the developed world to operate outside ethical expectations. According to Cordoba (2004) situations have arisen where researchers from developed countries are being are used for purposes other than research (for example, for political purposes, legitimising the authority of certain stakeholders). This has also spread to issues of intellectual property and knowledge transfer where developed countries' companies use natural resources to conduct research to produce new biogenetic medicines. The transfer of knowledge to the developing country does not take place. (Cordoba 2004). Of great concern is the increased use of researches from Africa to further this cause at the expense of development of their individual societies.

Beyond the Limitations

It appears the assumption about the distant past and the future is exciting but the lack of control puts its status as social science in uncertainty. Both predictive and chronological errors can be minimised if the status of the models employed are remembered and utilised appropriately. They are useful in getting a grasp on complicated reality and particularly for deriving hypotheses for testing against reality. Determinism has a role, first is to assume that everything has a cause, factors can appear to be together but there maybe no link between them. Secondly; is to theorise that human affairs are determined by factors beyond human control.

Evaluation research is crucial for researchers and policymakers who wish to scrap ineffective programs while expanding successful ones. Deciding what to cut and what to keep based on objective, scientifically sound evaluations rather than on the potentially biased assessments of special interests will help restore the public's faith in the public sector. Even in a regime of morality politics, research remains vital as a means of demonstrating alternative strategies and ascertaining which might best help us reach highly valued goals. (George Galster http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=306772)

According to George Galster three practical suggestions do help social science policy research to effectively meet the challenges in the quest for sustainable development. First, legislatures should more frequently employ blue-ribbon panels of respected social scientists to produce concise, readable, state-of-the-art briefs on topics of forthcoming legislation. Such briefs could also form the core of legislative hearings. Second, new programs should be legislated with an accompanying requirement and appropriation for evaluation after a point at which programmatic benefits might be expected to accrue. Third, proposals solicited from social scientists to conduct such evaluations should be reviewed by government-convened panels of independent experts, so that to the greatest extent possible, applied social science can be subjected to a peer review process similar to that of the basic sciences. (Ibid)

Debate arose as to the degree of independence from public power that social scientists can, or should, maintain under different circumstances. While some argue that a close government nexus may shape research along financial, political or ideological lines, others consider that sciences can receive adequate financing without losing their independence. (www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp*)* There is no agreement regarding the role of the social scientist in public policy design. For some, this role should focus exclusively on explaining the causes and the context, and even evaluating the effects of policy, while remaining outside actual policy implementation. (Ibid). For Africa, were the problems are rather complex, it is important for the social scientists to be involved in the development and administration of policy as this will enable them to continually evaluate and adjust to the ever changing environment.

International agencies have a role to play particularly in strengthening the bond between academia and public policy, especially with regard to the financing and promotion of research focused on generating strategic thinking. (Ibid). For Africa, this has been lacking given that the resources in terms of finance have been stalling efforts by social scientist to carry out research. Much more is needed in establishing

frameworks like Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and Council for Development of Social Science research in Africa (CODESRIA), and also going further in ensuring dissemination of the generated information by social scientist to critical sectors such as legislators and policy makers.

Another hindering factor has been the deficiency of the conceptual tools available today to social scientists to register the new and changing phenomena resulting from globalisation. Hence, the need to move further to expand empirical research on existing cases of innovation. (Ibid)

The need to overcome technical barriers to access the results of social science research is important, with relation both to physical access and to their language and format. Facilitating access to scientific output is the first concern, through the development of information systems that can simply connect policymakers with full text scientific documents, as well as condensed policy briefs. Secondly, a new methodology to publish the results of social science research is required. (Ibid)

E-social science will provide a window for accessing both qualitative and quantitative data. The belief is that e-Social Science will help solve fundamental problems in our disciplines. In essence we have to believe that a variety of classic challenges in the social sciences and some new questions may yield to e-Social Science techniques. Keeping in mind a clear view of the objectives of e-Social science can help the society of scholars avoid some traditional pitfalls of technology adoption in broader societies. (Ibid)

According to W.H. Dutton, there is need to move towards collaborative research which could put activists together with academics who have the research, findings, skills and expertise that are needed on a specific issue within a particular context. (http://www.ssrc.org/programs/media/publications/Dutton.Intro.Final.doc). There is need to stress that converting an academic into an advocate leads to the loss of the independence, legitimacy and credibility of the academic.

Overally, there is need to adopt a global rather than a national or localised perspective for research. Most methodologies for research in the social sciences have evolved for use at the national level or smaller areas. Most current studies of the driving forces of human actions are conducted on regional and local levels, and the applicability of the results beyond the study areas frequently is unclear. (Frank G.Sadowski, et al 1993) This often leads to replication of studies to test the findings in different settings and environment, which tend to waste time and financial resources or designing policies that will only be applicable to only single small geographical area or issue.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the motivation for social science lies in human endeavour to improve his lot. This has been done through rigorous probing and uncovering of underlying fundamental truths on human

phenomenology. However, the authenticity of social science research has largely been questionable given the various limitations it is exposed to in the field. There have been concerns from other circles that social sciences are less scientific and that there is a great degree of human error, interference and influence in the outcome and presentation of these results. Given the limitation to social research one is left wondering as to the extent to which the truth can be found. But that is not the basis for ignoring social research because that is the only way the truth can be established. For Africa where challenges appear to be so many, it is important to note that the unusual concern with reliability occurs only when accepted views are challenged and truth can be arrived at by continuous probing into the gaps between what people think is happening and what actually occurs.

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