

## RESEARCH IMPERATIVENESS AND THE PROBLEMS OF AFRICA SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*The ability of a society to utilize research based knowledge is critical for sustainable socio-economic development and for effective participation in the global economy. In developed countries, investment in knowledge based research and development exceeds investment in physical infrastructure. However, this cannot be said of Africa as research in this part of the world is usually faced with a number of problems. The paper examines the importance of research to socio- economic development of Africa. The study was conducted in Nigeria. Nigeria comprises of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nigeria is located in West Africa. The study adopted descriptive research design with systematic review of literature. The study made use of secondary data such as journal articles and newspapers. The study revealed that research leads to increment in the stock of useful knowledge; training skilled graduates; creating new scientific instruments; forming network for social interaction and increasing capacity for scientific and technological problem-solving, as well as creating new jobs which automatically improves the socio-economic status of the citizens. The study also revealed that researches that are sponsored from foreign countries and by foreign organizations seek to satisfy what the sponsors think are African problems, hence do not answer empirical indigenous challenges and does not guarantee independence of African nations within the continent. The study concludes that research is the bed rock for any nation or continent's development. The nature and type of research determines the pace of development. The paper advocates for more quality attention to be given to researchers with empirical proofs to solve core challenges of socio-economic development in Africa. It recommends that if the various identified problems are properly and adequately tackled, there will be a repositioning of research in Africa, thus, creating more avenues with regard to socio-economic development which will contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.*

**Keywords:** Research, Africa, Socio-economic, Development, Imperativeness

### Introduction

Conceptually, development can be said to be the ability of man to cater and conquer his environment and utilize it to his advantage. Otaki (2006) sees development as a rapid and sustainable use in the output per head and attendant shift in technical and demographic structure or variables. Rodney (1988) sees it as acquisition of certain social features of some particular parts of the world. However, the global community has currently focused not only on development but developments that are sustainable. Sustainable development is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources,

the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations (World Commission on Economic Development (WCED) (1987).The report identified two key concepts in the definition of sustainable development: the concept of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitation by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs. Despite the imperativeness of research to sustainable development, only few studies have been carried out to establish the extent role of research in solving the problems of Africa Socio-economic development, hence this study is design to address that void.

Research is basically the basic foundation for every process of development in society. It is the engine room for every purposeful development. Research outcome produces objective results that stabilize a nation’s socio-economic sector and condition. Grieswell (2008), define research as a process or steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of an issue. Grinnell (1993) on the other hand sees research as a structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge. It is clear that research is an orderly process engaged in towards acquiring empirical knowledge for application to objective realities. Obikeze, (1990); Monette, Sullivan, and Delong, (1994) also sees it as a systematic process of investigation or inquiry carried out in accordance with laid down scientific procedures for the purpose of finding answers or solutions to a set of defined problems or perplexing issues. One can therefore state that research is used at any level to establish and confirm facts or reaffirm the results of previous works, solve new or existing problems, and develop theories as well as chart a new course of development. Research can be carried out to understudy people, events, or explain objectives at different points in time and for different purposes. Basically, the need for research is to determine information that will lead to planning and strategies towards achieving socio economic development whether in developed or developing societies

### **Typologies of Research**

This paper concentrates on social research imperativeness to socio-economic development of societies and this can be seen in four different categories:

- i. Pure or fundamental research
- ii. Applied research
- iii. Action research
- iv. Evaluation research

Obikeze (1990) explained the above categorization as a compendium of social research in an enclosure of investigation on human nature, groups, relationships, organizations or institutions in society. It is worth mentioning as earlier discussed that each of these typologies though differentially undertaken is structured clearly to provide facts/information to development. One question is clear, how has research been successfully or productively utilized in the under-developed society as ours? Do any of these basic methods really apply and help to solve problems for which they are designed to investigate? These and other questions direct this paper. It is therefore necessary to explain these briefly as thus:

- The pure or fundamental research concentrates on investigating some basic ideas or abstract concepts mainly for some heuristic reasons. This concerns itself mainly to investigating issues bothering on marriage, religion, work, policies etc.

- Applied research, relates to the type of research with an outcome intended for immediate utilization and direct application for something whether good or ill. For instance, it looks at factors responsible for satisfaction in African marriage system.
- Action research refers to research whose result is intended for direct application in solving a specified social problem or handling a specific action. This type of research persecutes specific implementation strategies for achieving specific source or action like undertaking a research to eradicate the menace of cultism or drug abuse in public schools.
- Evaluation research on the other hand is designed to assess the extent to which an on-going or completed planned programme of intervention or development is capable of or has achieved a desired goal. The conclusion to this generally, is the crave to achieve sustainable socio-economic development.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

New Growth Theory was adopted for the theoretical orientation of this study. The theory was propounded by Romer in 1994. The basic tenet of the theory is that knowledge and search for technological development is imperative to economic development. It also posits that human desires and unlimited wants foster ever increasing productivity and economic growth. The new growth also posits that real GDP per person will perpetually increase because people's pursuit of profits (Philleo, 2015). The theory explains that research is a panacea to the problem of Africa Socio-economic development. This study is anchored on this theory because it best explains why there has not been much significant development in Africa. Considering that no society can develop beyond its knowledge base, Africa as a continent may not develop if research is not given its proper place.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Nigeria. Nigeria comprises of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nigeria is located in West Africa. The study adopted descriptive research design with systematic review of literatures. The study made use of secondary data such as journal articles and newspapers.

### **Research and Development: The African Perspective**

Our concern principally situates research within the development of African continent and her socio-economic expositions and growth. Socio-economic development answers qualitative changes in the structure and framework of society that helps society to better realize its aims and objectives (Jacobs & Asolleun, 1999). In order to achieve objective research to determine socio-economic development, the research and the researcher must divorce self from subjective issues to maintain ethical values and objectivity and achieve productive outcome. Often times and among Africans, many factors including socio-cultural factors, people's norms, values among others are seen as limiting factors against productive research outcome, hence, hindering socio-economic development. Who then identifies a problem for study? Who determines the design and process or duration? Is it the sponsor of the research, or the consultant researcher with ethical and expert knowledge? It is clear that if the sponsor identifies and set the ground rules for research as often done, it may not lead to the process of

bringing out the solution for socio-economic problems, hence the defeat of the research aim.

It is clear that the emergence of rapid growth of new products, technology and ideas determine new trends in research, hence, by extension socio economic development. Research and development especially socio-economic development is seen as a process of transformation in an economy which combines economic growth and social change in generating social and economic welfare, thus, bringing according to Tombofa (2004) about a ride in the standard of living of the people. To achieve development, therefore, research produces the following benefits such as:

- a. Increment in the stock of useful knowledge
- b. Training skilled graduates
- c. Creating new scientific instruments
- d. Forming networks for social interaction
- e. Increasing capacity for scientific and technological problem-solving, as well as creating new jobs which automatically improve the socio-economic status of the citizens.

Available records show that developed societies have considerable high level of investments in knowledge-based research and development which exceeds physical investment. This is true according to World Bank (2002) report that the ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialize and use knowledge is critical for sustainable economic growth and for effective participation in the global economic participation.

In Africa, other underdeveloped continents of Asia and Latin America for instance, the prevalence of poverty, diseases, malnutrition. Unemployment, poor sanitation and inadequate water supply are all increasing social and economic problems and issues that are crying for attention and which research knowledge has not been able to curb or conveniently proffer reasonably lasting solutions. Some striking issues as raised can be explained by the following points to give insight on the problem of research and African's socio economic development in contemporary discourse.

- The researches, methodologies and outcomes are often not relevant and strategically designed to problem-solving approach in rural socio-economic transformation. This is mostly due to the fact that the nature of research, problem identified and the trend of such researches are externally directed to satisfy the sponsoring agency or organization. Therefore, most research outcomes are not effectively utilized to solve local needs and problems, which in essence allow these people and the countries at the same point to experience socio-economic growth even though records would show the high amount of financial investment to enhance socio-economic development.
- Funding: African countries and organizations do not have enough money earmarked for researches/researchers, hence, qualitative researches that needs fund are not undertaken. This somehow limit the ability to gather adequate knowledge about the challenges at local and national levels, thus, no concrete measures to solving them. Where multi-national and multilateral agencies try to partner with local agencies or governments, they try to dictate the pace. It is clear today, that about 70% to 90% of research findings are externally determined, conditioned and directed, which often times serve the needs and desires of these external donors or sponsors.

- Lack of unified assessment framework of research output and utilizable products, and the need for a formal code of the process for assessment, prototype testing, inculcation and adaptation.
- Lack of political will/ideology. The political will and ideology of any nation in research and socio-economic development determines the national and continental progress. This is defected on the government's interest in implementing results and recommendations of such researches.
- Research intension: Researches in Africa will best serve the needs of the continent if it is focused on two fundamental pillars. The global world and the African continent (UNESCO, 2009). Africans are most ideal to undertake their researches due to their knowledge of the environmental condition and her peculiar problems.
- The issue of Brain drain; Poor remuneration and working conditions of university teachers as well as no steady compulsory policy on academic capacity building to meet global competition and intellectualism drains the best/quality brains outside the continent to where the conditions are better.
- Cultural practices and traditions: The increased lie on African traditions and cultural beliefs and practices are somehow limiting the successes of research utilization outcome. Also some practices restrict researches from accessing respondents like women prohibition from relating with male counter parts, other researches may coincide none-members, hence, doing a research that is time bound is difficult and almost impossible.
- Lack of research integrity and ethical values: Most researchers do not have discipline and integrity in undertaking proper field research due to poor ethical value orientation or inadequate funding. They sometimes embellish information, produce wrong reports, or refrain from even truly conducting the proper field research etc, hence creating more problems than proffering solutions.
- Social and environmental insecurity: The increasing social insecurity challenge at different Africa rural and urban settings have restricted researchers from accessing some areas like the North-East and North-North killings and bombing in Nigeria for instance. Also the difficult economic and environmental terrain in African Tropical areas, mountainous terrains and underdeveloped areas are all limiting factors for researchers to conduct proper research for socio-economic development.
- The issue of language barrier: African continent (countries) generally is a multi-linguistic continent which limits to a great extent effective communication between the researcher and the local people. This gap often times results to lack of cooperation as well as embellishment of data, which falls contrary to research objectives. Sometimes, researches that entail qualitative methodologies like participant observation, focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviewing (IDI) are not easily achieved especially when it involves larger sample population.

### **Way Forward**

Despite the aforementioned challenges, there is a dare need for a collective articulation of ideas for an onward movement towards strengthening research for socio-economic development. One of this is the successful hosting of conferences where it is expected that practical steps be suggested and taken to curb these challenges which will be identified by different researchers.

There should be a more decisive commitment on the part of the political leadership or government towards clearly encouraging research for socio-economic development and not just for documentation purposes.

The educational sector should be thoroughly overhauled to the extent that academics imbibe the moral ethics and desire, research institutes, other tertiary institutions should form centers where capacities of to engage in purposeful researches that will result to socio-economic development in society. Academics researchers are regularly build and updated to meet global practices. Funds should be provided (not in principles) and undue democratic bottleneck be eliminated, which will delay or restrict researchers from getting or accessing such fund.

Research findings/outcomes in terms of recommendations should be taken seriously by relevant bodies for implementation and creating high level of confidence on the part of the local populace. This will encourage them to cooperate with other researchers in their quest for future exercises using same population. Researchers called out in Africa must be more relevant to the African culture, environment and socio-economic development and needs of Africa. More tertiary institutions should establish courses and programmes that will expose students and researchers to exploring the problems in Africa and hence, helping to proffer implementable solutions for development.

Counter-part funding and cooperation between African nations, agencies and establishments should be coordinated and directed by African researchers as key players. This means, the research needs must be truly African and so the solutions or outcome will be of benefit to socio-economic development and transformation.

Post-graduate and graduate training programmes should be over hauled to reflect basic training process that looks inwards first before researchers' need to collaborate with others in developed countries. This means that while foreign research counterparts gain pleasure to study or research in rural African communities, majority of African indigenous researchers prefer urban settings (except for some anthropological ethnographic studies). This will not proffer real developmental solutions that will seek to eradicate the misuse of research outcome or the non-productive nature of African researches in proffering socio-economic solutions for development.

### **Conclusion**

Research generally is the bedrock for any nation or continent's development. The nature and type of research however determines the pace of development. This again is a function of how much efforts and interest is invested in the research. The imperativeness of every socio, cultural, economic, political and scientific research can no longer be over-emphasized towards societal development. The paper therefore advocates for more quality attention to be given to researches with empirical proofs to solve core challenging problems in which researchers are being tele-guided with the prepared outcome. Research consultants should respect the guiding principles and ethics of research to really justify the objective reasons for the engagement by being purely objective and transparent. When this is done, there should be a commensurate response by the sponsoring organizations to be committed to implementing research findings or outcome especially to the local communities or people where such studies had been undertaken. This will as earlier mentioned affirm and restore trust and cooperation from the study population subsequently. Clearly, research is the major platform at whatever level where socio-economic development hinges upon when done in line with the principles, ethics, and intent for purposeful development. To achieve

this however, there must be collective effort by all towards the need to attain socio-economic sustainable development.

### **Limitation of the study and guide for further studies**

The limitation of the study is that there are few studies on the role of research in solving Africa socio-economic problems. This affected the quality of the literature review. On the other hand, in view of the findings of this study, it will be imperative to further research in the following:

- Challenges of research in Africa.
- Comparative analysis of the role of research in socio-economic development; A study of West Africa Countries.
- An empirical study on the enduring solution to the problems of research in Africa and particularly in Nigeria.

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