

COORDINATING AND UTILIZING RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Mbia Stephen Mbia

Abstract

Coordinating and utilizing research findings from tertiary institutions and specialized research institutes to provide theoretical and practical support to Government policies and programmes have been of great concern to researchers, informed, and well-meaning people in the country. In Nigeria, national Development and wellbeing will continue to remain abysmally poor without proper coordination and utilization of numerous research findings relevant to our peculiar socio-economic challenges. Against this background this paper examines the conceptual framework of research, the relevance of research findings for policy formulation and implementation, the expected links between research institutes and policy makers, the constraints on the utilization of research findings in Government decision-making and implementation processes, and ways of enhancing the acceptability of research findings by public policy decision-makers in the country to enhance national development especially in the economic, scientific, educational and technological spheres.

Conceptual Framework

Every human society is constructed upon a basic structure of accumulated knowledge obtained through a variety of ways: communication, imitation, experience, investigation, experiment and analysis (Ukwu, 1980). The quality of life in the society depends very much on the stock and use of research findings for effective application in solving its' numerous and multi-dimensional problems.

Research has been defined variously by different authorities. The commonest definition is that advanced by the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary as "Systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge". This definition points to the critical role of research as a factor in the development process.

The realities of the present international Economic order by way of marked disparities in the level of development between the advanced industrialized nations of the world and the less developed third world nations is traceable not to differences in national resource endowment, not from differences in innate intellectual endowment, but from the great inequalities in the range and level of knowledge and skills in use. (Bamidele, 2004)

Nigeria is one of the nations of the world yearning for rapid socio-economic and technological development. Arising from this need, Government at various levels especially the Federal Government has established a number of research institutes to provide practical inputs to the development process. Besides the formal research establishments, the Universities, Polytechnics, College of Agriculture and Education conduct researches in various fields of academic and non-academic interests.

National research establishments in the country include the National Cereals Research Institute, Veterinary Research Institute, Animal Production and Cocoa Research Institutes. Others

include the Nigeria Educational Research Council, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic research, National Council for Arts and Culture, National Institute for policy and Strategic Studies, Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, the petroleum Research Institute, the Metallurgical institute, etc. Private sector involvement in local research and development is still minimal. This situation is made so because the private sector in Nigeria is largely dominated by foreign investors – Multinational co-operations which operate as mere subsidiaries of the parent companies abroad. Their researches are therefore, foreign based and foreign oriented and therefore of little relevance to the realities of Nigerian developmental needs.

Emanating from the above analysis arises the critical problem of how to coordinate and utilize the findings of the various research establishments in the country to fast track and complement national development efforts. It is however, obvious that some of the problems associated with research and development lie in the structure, function, and manner of their interaction within the larger national development system. The paper however, does not intend to delve into the details of these encumbrances.

The Relevance of Research Findings for Policy Formulation and Implementation

Policy formulation and implementation are crucial to the effective operation of any socio-economic system. Ajakaiye (1992) defined policy as “any action or plan adopted by a decision maker designed to deliberately manipulate the relevant parameters of a socio-economic system so as to obtain specific desire alternation in the functioning of the system”. Every policy, he further noted, has intended and unintended effects as well as desire and often unintended effects. Research findings provide information which may form the basis of policy formulation. In addition, they also play important roles in the analysis of information which could aid the policy maker in deciding the overall desirability of the proposed policy. In order words, research findings apart from detailing the comprehensive benefits and cost of a policy can provide a useful guide to action.

Most policy makers do not possess a working knowledge of the problems, specification of desirable alternative in the functioning of the system and the parameters to which a policy must be addressed. For this purpose, ex-post researches are of great importance. Such findings clearly articulate the working of the system, evaluate the desirability or otherwise of its outcomes and indicate the key parameters which should be manipulated in order to effectively alter the functioning of the system and realize the desired outcome(s). Such research findings form the basis of the manifestos of political parties or plan of action by a given Government.

Ajakaiye (1992) further articulated that in a situation where the objectives of a policy maker are not revealed, research findings can provide input in the process of formulating alternative policy scenarios and trajectories. This will provide the policy maker the opportunity of selecting the ones that he finds most desirable.

Research findings are also critical to policy formulation and implementation in the sense that they provide a basis for monitoring performance. Once a policy option has been initiated, its performance or outcome can be ascertained through a systematic monitoring process made easy by relevant research findings on such a policy.

Finally, research findings, by pointing out the desirable and undesirable effects of a given policy provide a basis for articulating compensatory policies to be implemented so as to minimize the undesirable outcome. In this connection, research findings are quite efficacious in the formulation or re-enforcing of a constant battery of policies.

The Constraints on the Utilization of Research Findings

A number of problems have been identified as constraints on the acceptance and utilization of research findings. These include, power struggle, communication gap, narrow scope of policy research and lack of financial leverage.

Power Tussle

This is applicable to research institutes owned and supervised by Government ministries. The struggles to maintain control over the activities and operations of the institutes pose a constraint on the smooth relationship between the institutes and the Government. As a result, the findings of research institutes not supervised by certain ministries may not be accepted if it is not relevant to their operational or functional requirements.

Communication Gap

This constraint is in terms of the inability of research institutes to develop and maintain interaction in an environment of mutual trust and respect consistent with the relevant arms of Government to which they should related professionally. If this happens they could face the problem of dysfunctional relationship which could mar their effort and credibility and thus hamper the acceptance and use of their findings.

Presentation of Research Findings

Adams (2007) contends that quite often, research findings are presented in very voluminous form such that policy formulators find it impracticable to pick out relevant findings. In addition to this, is the problem of language. The over academicalization of research reports has constituted a problem to the policy makers who may have not been familiar with academic and technical terms found in such reports. Utilization of such finding may become difficult.

Narrow Scope of Policy Research

Several research findings are difficult to be accepted by government primarily because they are not comprehensive enough. Most often, the research carried out is too narrow in scope, devoid of interdisciplinary orientation, too abstract, over intellectual and clearly a product of dogmatic view of life. And if the findings are seen to be constantly dogmatic, the interaction between the research institutes (s) and policy makers may be permanently hindered. (Hock,2008).

Lack of Finance Leverage

Local research institutions lack financial leverage. They cannot compete with foreign ones. Poor funding by Government limits the scope of research and quality of findings. Low quality finding may not be attractive to the policy-maker and so low patronage of local research findings by policy formulators.

. Expected links between Research Institutes and Policy Makers

Appropriate linkage between research institutes responsible for producing these findings and the policy makers who use them is important if the potential benefits are to be maximized.

Basically, two types of links between research institutes and policy maker can be identified. The first, is the administrative link. Any research institute created by Government should be administratively linked to it. It could be linked to the supervising ministry or the presidency. The

appointment of principal and key functionaries of a research institutes by Government provide the linkage. The secondary type of link is professional. A typical research institute should be professionally linked to policy makers so that its' output, i.e. research findings may find application in public policy formulation (Ajakaiye, 1992).

Ways of Proper Coordination and Utilization of Search Findings

Enhancing the proper co-ordination and utilization of research findings for sustainable national development demands removing those constraints that have been identified. To this end, an imaginative and careful assignment of roles and responsibilities and the internalization of the types, levels and modalities of co-ordination and integration of the activities of the various institutions involved is necessary. Government should develop a holistic framework for articulating its research needs and having them met.

The current approach of research finding should change emphasis. It should shift from the funding of researchers to the funding of research task, and from short-term research projects to medium and long term research programmes. The programmes approach is significant in that it can de-link development research from routine studies with its inadequacies especially shallowness of findings. There is also need for cross-cutting of research institutes which can provide the organization and clearing house for necessary integration among various research bodies across the country.

Ukwu (1980) states in the above respect that research and development feed on itself. That the intensity of interaction among institutions within easy access to one another is one of the greatest catalysts in technological transformation. Research institutes also need reasonable autonomy in deciding how its research findings should be disseminated. Centralization of administrative links will also go a long way in relaxing the constraints of power struggle on acceptance of research findings. In order to reduce communication gap, research institutes should embark on quite seminar brainstorming sessions and workshops attended by all relevant government agencies. Experience has shown that quiet meetings which are often in small groups provide opportunity for close and intensive interactions which foster a sense of collaboration among policy makers and researchers.

It has been observed that the policy makers have no time to read voluminous and brain-rocking reports. Research institutes should always present their reports in several versions depending upon the audience. Basically, those addressed to policy formulators should be written in simple language, brief and contain practical solutions to the problem (s) under consideration.

Conclusion

The paper has considerably, discussed the conceptual framework of research and the critical problem of coordinating and utilizing the findings of various research establishments to complement National Development efforts. It admits that research findings provide information which may form the basis of policy formulation and implementation and suggested appropriate linkages between research institutes responsible for producing these research findings and policy formulators who use them. Some constraints on the acceptance and utilization of research findings which include power Tussle, communication gap, manner of presentation of research findings, narrow scope of policy research and lack of financial leverage have been identified

The current approach to research funding should be changed and emphasis should shift from the funding of research to the funding of research tasks and from short-term research projects to medium and long term research programmes

Recommendations

Emanating from the scenario discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are made which if implemented by Governments at all levels will go a long way to enhance the proper coordination and utilization of research findings for sustainable National development.

1. Government especially Federal and State Governments, should evolve an all embracing and effective framework for articulating its research requirements and ensuring that they are achieved.
2. An innovative and result oriented approach to research funding be introduced by relevant research funding bodies. Programmes approach medium and long term research programmes be funded.
3. The linkage constraint, power tussle and the resultant communication gap can be ameliorated by centralization of administrative links, seminars, and workshops attended by all relevant Government agencies and researchers to foster better understanding and collaboration between them.
4. Research reports should not be prepared and presented in frightening volumes and esoteric language. They should be concise, simple and practical oriented capable of offering needed and enduring solutions to diverse national problems.

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