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## **Senior Policy Workshop**

# **Enhancing the Interface Between Government Policy and Decision-Making Entities and Research/Training Institutions in Support of Economic Reform and Development in Africa**

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING IN  
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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**Organized by**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1 - 3
II.	THE STATE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING .....	3 - 6
III.	SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AS A TOOL OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY .....	7 - 10
IV.	CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	10 - 11
	REFERENCES .....	12 - 13

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

The importance of this Senior Policy Seminar on enhancing dialogue between Government policy-makers and research institutions, especially at this time of persistent socio-economic crisis resulting mainly from the poor choice of policy instruments and decisions in many developing countries, is quite simple. I believe that it is the responsibility of social science researchers to provide the knowledge, based on sound and objective scientific research, which could form the basis of policies formulated to accelerate the rate of national development in the less developed countries.

There is no doubt that the pace of development depends partly on the state of knowledge of research endeavour in the social sciences and the success of policy-makers and implementers in transferring the knowledge into specific policy packages, development programmes and projects. In order to have the greatest, desirable and positive impact on the development of the LDCs, social scientists must address their research to the issues and problems of top priority in national socio-economic development.

The need for this, has become more and more evident because of the relatively small size of the social science research community in many developing countries. However, despite the considerable sums of money which have been used in funding social sciences research in many developing countries, the impact of social research on policy-making and national development has been minimal if not negligible. There has been often the repeated charge that social science researchers and scholars in developing countries confine themselves to their Ivory Towers and there is need for research to be more relevant to national development needs.

In view of the extreme importance of social science research for policy-making, execution and monitoring in the LDC's, the purpose of this paper is two fold. Firstly, it is to demonstrate the lack of co-ordination between social science research and policy making in the developing countries. Secondly, it is to illustrate the importance of social science research as a foundation of sound government policy, particularly in the developing countries where economic and social indicators are crude, faulty and unreliable.

The necessity to examine this problem, particularly in the special context of the developing countries arises from the fact that social science research provides all bases for government policies in any political system. Whether the researcher should participate in policy making is a debatable issue since decision making is not itself part of research. Not debatable, however, is the need for social science research to devise different government policies and to examine the consequences of each of the alternative policies on the target population.

To be sure, one important condition for the success of any government in any society is its ability to understand the economic, political, cultural and social problems of the masses; and to anticipate their needs and aspirations in those facets of the nation where it has been entrusted with responsibility. At the same time, however, it must anticipate whether or not the possible means of satisfying those needs are adequate and to do this, social science research has to be carried out with a view to determining the important and strategic factors which influence them.

## **II. THE STATE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING**

Social science research as a tool of sound government development policy has not been given adequate attention and support in many developing countries. Specifically, very few attempts have been made to support research and utilize the results of social science research in order to ascertain the current state of affairs, to indicate future economic, political, cultural and social prospect and advocate what corrective measures, if any, may be needed.

Because there is often very little or no co-ordination between research endeavour and the government policies initiated, many of the latter have tended to fail. Generally, consideration is not often given to the fact that the preparation of a government annual budget rests in part on an analysis of the needs and desires of the people and the availability of the resource to meet those needs. Consequently, budget estimates are often based on false or erroneous assumptions. Equally important is the enactment of development programmes which can alleviate the economic, political, social and cultural problems of a developing nation - the plight of the peasant, the problems of small businesses, etc.

Since few attempts are often made to undertake some research of those kinds of problems, the result has been the initiation of many policies which are hardly successful. This is true of cases where wrong policy instruments are chosen to realize a particular development goal or objective and also for situations where existing policy instruments have not been examined to determine whether or not they are sufficient to ensure the achievement of the goals that are being pursued.

This is particularly true in those developing countries where many para-public bodies are created without examining the existing institutions, with a view to determining whether or not there is a potential duplication of functions; why the existing ones have partially or totally failed in their mission (particularly, whether they had adequate policy instruments at their disposal or had used the wrong instruments in the attempt to accomplish their task); and finally what the potential advantage of the new institutions over the existing ones are. Rather than undertake this invaluable exercise before introducing new policies, many para-public bodies have been created in many developing countries only with a view to providing jobs to political favourites, despite the apparent duplication of functions between the existing and the new institutions.

Furthermore, the failure to use the results of social science research as the basis for policy making in many developing countries is due to the absence of adequate financial and material support of researchers and specialists. Very often research institutions which are created for research purposes, hardly ever carry out their functions. Rather, many of the institutions waste

time on administrative procedures, setting up committees and holding numerous meetings which produce little or no results. Indeed, many of the pronouncements on the importance of social science research for policy-making are hardly translated into reality.

Financial requests for the support of social science research by specialists in many developing countries are often met with administrative red-tape. As a consequence, many social science researchers who undertake research on political, social and cultural issues and problems are compelled to turn to international research institutions for financial support which is often hard to come by. This is partly because of the keen international competition for research funds and partly because of the wider financial commitment of those institutions and the specific interest of the funding institutions.

The consequences of this regrettable situation, with respect of the absence of effective collaboration between social science research and policy making in the developing countries, are obvious. By neglecting the use of social science research as the basis of sound government policy, policy making fails to analyze objectively the development problems and issues in question. As a consequence, wrong and inappropriate policy instruments are applied at the wrong time and very often to the wrong problems. The result is that difficulties are encountered in the process of implementing and monitoring the chosen policies.

Furthermore, the prevailing situation has led to enormous waste of time, energy, manpower and financial resources which are scarce in many developing countries. To be sure, the absence of financial support for social science research projects initiated by indigenous researchers has led to frustration. This has tended to force researchers more and more to design projects which reflect largely the research priorities of international development organizations and foundations not those of the developing countries. Such a situation if left unchecked will eventually deprive the developing countries of their trained manpower since many of the specialists may in the long run want to take up permanent research positions in those organizations.

In order to alleviate this unfortunate situation, it is absolutely necessary that policy makers and research institutions in the developing countries recognize the importance and relevance of social science research as a tool of policy-making. Social science researchers in Cameroon are fortunate to have the Ministry of Higher Education, which has been created to formulate, orientate and implement government development policy in the field of teaching and scientific research.

The former Institute of Human Sciences of Cameroon in particular carried out a number of research projects on the history and culture of the Cameroon people as well as comparative studies of their political and judicial systems with a view to determining how the latter could contribute to Cameroon's modern institutions. Social scientists in the Institute of Human Sciences upto 1991 had the unique opportunity of identifying the many socio-economic issues and problems that the country is presently facing, diagnose their root causes and then propose solutions for them. The Ministries that cater for these problems generally indicated their desire to have the Institute of Human Sciences carry out studies in these areas. Most of the Institute's research operations for 1984/85 were for the most part, designed and executed; taking cognizance of the requests submitted by the various Ministerial Departments and Parapublic Development Corporations in Cameroon.

Unfortunately, however, like in many developing countries, there was no well laid down government policy of social science research in Cameroon. Instead research was carried out for the sake of research. In particular, there was no link between basic social science research, applied social science research and policy-making in the various Ministries and State Development Corporations. To alleviate this problem, it is important for social science researchers in developing countries to examine the relationship between social science research and development policy-making with a view to demonstrating that the success of the latter depends largely on the former. One must not undermine the problem of unreliable and incomplete data and documentation which confront all social science researchers in many developing countries, particularly in Africa.

### III. SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AS A TOOL OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY

As a tool of development policy, social science research has three distinct phases of operation which are closely related to each other. Firstly, social science research involves the investigation of the economic, political, cultural and social structures of the country in question. This calls for the continuous gathering of data (both quantitative and qualitative) about the size and nature of the system under investigation.

The Institute of Human Sciences of Cameroon for example, undertook studies on the socio-economic impact of the co-operative movements in the North West Province. The studies were designed to determine the effectiveness of this movement and to see how it can be adopted by, if not adapted to other parts of the country. The findings and recommendations became invaluable to the Cameroon government as the State saw the support for individual and collective development as the only way to preserve, consolidate and sustained national economic and social development.

The Institute of Human Sciences also carried out extensive studies on demographic shifts in Cameroon; notably on rural-urban migration of youths. Data collected as a result of these studies enabled the Cameroon government to reappraise and reinforce its development policies. In addition, agro-economists from the Institute of human Sciences also undertook studies directed at examining the effectiveness of "development missions". Sociologists, on the other hand, examined the impact of the "disenclavement" effort on the local population. These economic and sociological studies were supposed to serve as a "fed-back" to the Cameroon government decision-makers and to enable them re-examine their policies in these areas.

The second stage of social science research involves diagnosis. This means the description, with the aid of the available data, of the events that are taking or have taken place in the system and an analysis of the forces which have accounted for such events. This may include, for example, such day-to-day developments in the socio-economic system as changes in population, employment level, the general price levels, etc.

The final phase of social science research involves the prediction of future trends and patterns of developments in the system under study. This is the most difficult and interesting stage, especially as many uncontrollable but strategic factors do come into play during the process of making the predictions. In a nutshell then, social science research involves the investigation of the economic, political, social and cultural structures of the country in question with a view to obtaining the relevant socio-economic data which can assist researchers in making predictions about the future trend of events.

On the other hand, what does government development policy mean and what does it involve? Government development policy, for our purpose, refers to government efforts to look after the "general interest" either by changing certain qualitative aspects of the existing system (for example the creation of a Customs Union, a para-public corporation, nationalization of foreign industry, etc.), or by changing within the qualitative framework of the given economic, political, cultural and social structure, certain parameters which are termed instruments of policy (for example, the personal income tax rate, the interest rate, the exchange rate, etc.)

Given the individual preference indicators of the citizens, the objective of government development policy is:

- (a) To fix a collective or social preference indicator (such as the national economic development plan) which reveals the broad development goals;
- (b) To choose the relevant and adequate instruments of policy for the realization of those goals; and
- (c) To formulate the relationship between the goals and policy instruments on the one hand and the structure on the economy on the other.

Thus, government development policy, like social science research, involves three closely related phases: an indication of the goals to be attained; the choice of the relevant policy

instruments, and the specification of the relationship between the stated goals, the chosen development policy instruments and the socio-economic structure.

Certainly, any sound government development policy requires objective social science research on many counts. Firstly, the establishment of a collective or social preference function, will necessarily require a complete knowledge, if possible, of the socio-economic behaviour of the individuals in the society and the various development indicators of the socio-economic system. This information can only be obtained through an objective investigation of the relevant economic, social, political and cultural system; the absence of which, the formulation of the social preference function can hardly be carried out on a rational basis.

Secondly, an analysis of the data (on any aspect of the structure of the country), which reveals certain changes in the system including how and why they have taken place; enables the policy-maker to identify the various problems which call for government action and to select the appropriate development goals, including the relevant policy instruments which can be utilized to achieve those goals.

Finally, the specification of the relationship between the goals and instruments of development policy requires an application of the knowledge of social science research techniques. This is necessary because the establishing of such a relationship can enable the policymaker, for example, to find out what the impact of a selected policy instrument or set of policy instruments will be on a particular goal or set of goals during a specified period of time.

For the purpose of illustration, if an increase in tariff barriers is advocated as a means of improving conditions in certain domestic industries, it is generally possible to gauge in advance the effect on these industries and on the national economy as a whole of such a measure. It is also possible to estimate with some reliability the extent to which the sales of foreign products will be reduced, in the country in question, for given increases in the tariff rates. All these exercises require the proper knowledge of prediction techniques - the application of which

is even more challenging in developing countries which generally experience rapid economic, political, social and cultural structural changes during the early stages of development.

#### **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

As a concluding note to this paper, it is important to emphasize that the success of any development policy requires continuous and effective collaboration between social science researchers and decision-makers and institutions responsible for guiding the economic, political and social destiny of the masses of the people in the developing countries. Such collaboration could take the form of frequent exchange of views between the social science community and decision makers on national development problems and issues

Furthermore, the utility of social research will also depend largely on the manner in which the research results are presented and subsequently used by policy makers to solve the various problems confronting the developing countries. There is no doubt that in Cameroon, unlike in many developing countries, social science researchers were upto 1991 provided with adequate institutional, structural and financial means to enable them undertake research on many development problems which affected the day-to-day survival of the people. It was therefore, a challenge to the Cameroonian social science community to ensure that their research was objective, and reflected the basic needs of government Ministries, State Corporation and the people in general.

Unfortunately, however, by the end of 1991 this expectation was never attained despite the fact that the Institute of Human Sciences was created in 1980 with the sole purpose of providing the necessary research inputs to national policy-making process. The reasons for this sad experience ranged from the incompetence of many researchers, weak social research methodology and analytical techniques, lack of self-confidence and appreciation of rigours of social research on the part of many researchers, to the absence of effective communication

between the users of research results and researchers, administrative red tapes, bureaucracy and poor vulgarisation of research results; just to mention a few.

The socio-economic crisis led to a gradual but considerable reduction of funds for social research programmes and operations in the Institute. This finally led to the closing down of the Institute by the Government in October 1991. Needless to emphasize, it is hoped that other developing countries will draw on the Cameroon experience with a view to avoiding the sad and expensive mistakes which were made in the case of the former Institute of Human Sciences of Cameroon.

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