

Repositioning The Social Sciences For National Transformation: The Critical Role Of The Social Sciences Literature

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to determine strategies for repositioning the social sciences as effective tools for national transformation through the instrumentality of the social sciences literature. The need for this study arose in view of the spate of national transformations going on in many countries of the world today, including Nigeria. To achieve this; the paper defined the constructs of the topic which are: social sciences, social sciences literature and national transformation and examined the contributions of the social sciences to national transformation, the critical role of the social sciences literature, and the inherent challenges. The paper recommended the need for improving on the system of documentation and the dissemination channels, pressing for a greater role in the policy-making process, taking a more active interest and part in the implementation of research findings, and considering the updating of the methods of social science research

Keywords: Social sciences, Literature, National transformation, National development.

Introduction

The concept of social sciences has two perspectives: as a field of academic scholarship that explores aspects of human society, and as a major knowledge base that uses scientific methods to study society. The social sciences have the potential to play a leading role national transformation through its branch disciplines like, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, psychology, religion, and geography in diverse ways. These ways include, cultural, social, economical, political, educational and religious development. These contributions have manifested in areas like, industrial development, democracy, and good governance, healthcare services, constitutional developments etc. The total information available, collated or produced within the aforementioned fields of study in the social sciences or in the area of knowledge classified as social science and their subset, and the various fields of study within its coverage constitutes the literature of the social sciences.

National transformation is a gamut of social, economic, political and cultural change. The role of social science literature to national development is catalytic. This is because it is the fulcrum on which society is examined, it is also the tool used by policy makers to advance the course of society's advancement. It is the organized body of knowledge that is part of the development process, and as well assumes detachment to

examine society so as to chart the course of national transformation. The social sciences constitute an engine for national transformation around the world. However, many nations of the world don't seem to be making maximum use of them in their transformation programme. As much as the social sciences are prominent determinants for national transformation. The social sciences literature constitute an indispensable propeller for achieving that transformation. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to determine how these can be achievable. The paper defined the concepts social sciences, social sciences literature and national transformation and examined the contributions of the social sciences to national transformation, the critical role of the social sciences literature, and the inherent challenges. The paper also made recommendations for enhancing the utilization of the social sciences literature to reposition the social sciences for national transformation.

Concept Of The Social Sciences And Social Sciences Literature

There are two interpretive meanings given to the term "social science". One sees it as the fields of academic scholarship that explores aspects of human society. The other variant of the concept defines social science as the scientific study of society. A careful deconstruction of these conceptions of social science indicates a convergence of underlying unity in definition, and also point to two important features: as fields of study and as an instrument of social change both of which try to understand man's behavior in relation to other men and to the environment, and secondly, the activities of man as an individual in a group (community, society, nation etc). In other words, social sciences consist of those fields of study which are concerned with human relationships and interaction with fellow men and with the environment he lives in. (Mole, and Ugwu, 2009). In this direction, they are those mental or cultural sciences which deal with the activities of the individual as a member of a group. They are those fields of academic scholarship that explore aspects of human society (Trigg, 2001; Hunt and Colander, 2008)). These fields include: anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, linguistics, political science, sociology, international studies, communication, and psychology. One of the parameters for assessing the state of health of an academic discipline, according to Ekere, 2010 is the quantity and quality of literature, including books and journals.

The term literature is used in this paper to denote the total information available, collated or produced within a given subject or field of study. Thus, there are literatures on chemistry, biology, the arts, humanities etc. Within this context, social sciences literature is defined as the total information available or produce on social sciences or about the area of knowledge classified as social science and its subset, and the various fields of study within its coverage. Social science literature are developed through research (e.g. journals) scholarship (e.g. textbooks), and inspiration (e.g. the bible and other religious documents. By source, these literature are categorized into three: primary literature, secondary literature and tertiary literature.

Primary literature in the social science are those categorized as original sources which have not been interpreted by other scholars (Aina, 2004; Mole, 2010). These sources include journal articles, technical reports, dissertations, theses. conference

proceedings, research reports, oral recordings. Secondary literature in the social science are sources that interpret or condense primary literature. They modify, interpret, rearrange primary sources in order to provide additional information, explanations and details. Mole defined it as all organized information on social science that has been compiled from the original source. These are: indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, guides to literatures, handbooks and compendia, manuals, treaties and directories. Tertiary literature are used to define all general reading materials, not identified as social science literature *per ser.* but are consulted by social scientist for information. Government publications, newspapers and magazines, year books and almanacs all represents tertiary literature. It is important to note that these literature of the social sciences in their different classifications all contain information crucial to national transformation.

Concept Of National Transformation

The term “transformation” is an elusive concept with several meanings, lending itself to a contextual definition. Some researchers use the terms “transformation” “development’ and ‘growth” interchangeably. Others use words such as social change, evolution progress, advancement, and modernization as synonyms of transformation, and others use the term “transformation” to mean fundamental changes in social attitudes and institutions.

Transformation and development are often used interchangeably. However, the definitions by Debate to Action (2006), provides a clear-cut distinction. According to it, development is the quantitative transformation of a whole society and a shift to new methods of production. On the other hand, transformation is the quantitative and qualitative development of a whole society and a shift to new ways of thinking. Other authors distinguish between development and transformation in terms of their products: growth and change respectively (Eze, 2001). While development refers to growth, transformation refers to change. However, both involve the process of economic, political, social and cultural shift.

Transformation implies a complete change in something or somebody, in the way things are done or in the way people do things (Oxford Advance Dictionary). Derived from two words, (Trans (change), and form), to transform simply means to change the form of something. To be transformed is to have a complete/comprehensive positive change in the character, outlook/appearance, or image of something or somebody. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term “transformation” implies significant positive change in a specific direction designed to improve the welfare of society.

This comprehensive process of transformation cannot be imposed from outside the country. Hence social science which are people and society centered through the content of its disciplines and literature, can make significant impact.

How The Social Sciences Can Contribute To National Transformation

To many social science scholars and practitioners, it is not very clear if and how the social sciences can contribute to national transformation. It is therefore, important to,

first of all, state emphatically that the social sciences constitute an effective instrument for national transformation. The major areas of national transformation include the following: political, social, cultural, economic, religious, and educational transformation. Social transformation is concerned with the change in the mode of human interaction and relationship in the nation while economic transformation is concerned with the advancement in the status or condition of national wealth. Political development is connected with the advancement for better government in a nation.

However, the contribution of Social Sciences to national transformation can clearly be seen through their various disciplines, as outlined above. Political science dwells on how power and authority can be secured, managed, distributed and executed to bring about national development. The central focus of political science is on how power is utilized for maximum national development. One of its aims is to engender a democratic system of government where people are allowed to voice their opinion or the government seeks for the majority opinion of the public. Power, when utilized as supposed or expected, brings about national transformation. The welfare of the people will be the central focus. The people will be happy and will perform their complementary civic duties and obligations. This also results to state stability, economic progress, social cohesion and overall improvement of the living standards of the citizen and ultimately national transformation.

The needs, wants and desires of human beings are challenges that face every nation. For any nation to experience national transformation there will be positive advancement in satisfying unlimited wants, needs and desires. Since resources to satisfy these unlimited wants, needs and desires are inadequate, therefore, economics studies how this limited resources can be used to satisfy unlimited wants, needs and desires to bring about harmony and general satisfaction among the citizens.

The primary concern of sociology is on generally accepted rules, practices, norms and usages that suppose to define, direct and govern the behaviour or social relationship of men. This, no doubt, ensures national integration, national cohesion, national unity, religious tolerance, and social harmony.

Geography acquaints individuals with adequate knowledge on the climate, vegetation, population distribution, and even the land formation to the nation for maximum survival of the people of the nation(Glover, 1995). Over or under population in a nation, no doubt, affects the growth of a nation, therefore, knowledge of this, as a result constitute a veritable tool for national transformation.

One of the major ingredients for national transformation is the general behaviour and attitude of individuals to one another, the attitude of the government and the governed to each other, the behaviour and attitude of members of various religions, ethnic groups, communities, social classes, industrial cadres, etc. to one another. It also follows that the road to national transformation begins from behavioral transformation and orientation. Psychologists can play a prominent role in changing negative attitudes as well as increase the positive mode of relationship among the citizenry towards other citizens and members of the society and towards national institutions, policies, and programmes.

Religion can be referred to as regulatory system of beliefs, values, and practices pervasive in every stage of human societal evolution, which not only seeks to explain the relationship between man and the supernatural force or power but also tries to find answers and solutions to the ultimate problems of life. Religion can be an instrument for national transformation if it is used to find spiritual answers and solutions to the ultimate problems of life, including those relating to national well being and growth. Religion is a veritable instrument for promoting and maintaining social harmony, integration, stability, peace and progress without which national transformation may be unattainable.

The basics of existence of any country or nation are of a great importance for the country or nation and this can be provided by history. Though not accepted by many as a social science per se, history has a lot of social science features. History reveals the past activities of man, which has meaning and relevance to the present, and future of mankind. Guided by such records, historians and policy makers can make better, constructive, knowledge-driven, and result-oriented policies that can make any nation succeed in her transformation programme (Mole, 2008). Today, history keeps repeating itself because people fail to learn from history. If the mistakes in the past efforts at national transformation are corrected, the mistakes which jeopardized those efforts would have been avoided, paving way for better transformation programme

The Critical Role Of The Social Sciences Literature

Social science literature is a major propeller to national transformation and a potent instrument for furthering it: This is evident from the activities of research institutes established to act as agencies of development. For instance, the consultancy arm of the African Regional Center for Information (ARCIS) at the University of Ibadan is known for packaging information for several government agencies and companies in Africa. The Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi (FIIRO) established in 1955 is also involved in conducting social science research which are used for both national and industrial transformation. In the universities there are also research institutes such as the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) in the University of Ibadan; Economic Development Institute Unit, and the Human Resources Research Unit in University of Lagos; the Institute for Governance and Development in Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma; and Institute of African Studies in University around the world. The mandate of these institutes is to carry out researches on specific socio-political, cultural, economic, and educational issues. The literature generated from such researches serve as veritable ingredient for national transformation.

For instance, NISER focuses attention on the range of problems of the Nigerian economy with particular attention to specific problems such as unemployment in Nigeria, economic development, the public service in national economic planning and the structure of Nigerian imports and its implication for national development. Publications of research institution are very indispensable tools for policy makers, economic planners, scientists and other researchers alike. Such institutes include: Cocoa Research Institute (CRI), Rubber Research Institute (RRI), Oil Palm Research Institute (OPRI), Federal Institute of Industrial Research Oshodi (FIIRO), Project Development Institute (PRODA), Institute for Medical Research (IMR) etc.

Similarly, the Human Resources Research Unit in the University of Lagos is concerned with the social conditions of Nigeria. Its policy oriented research is designed to seek urgent means of practical applications to local problems. The Institute for Governance and Development which is located in Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma was established in 2002. Its research priorities are gender and development, culture and development/governance, governance, democracy and democratization, the state and political power, the environment and development; pluralism: ethnicity, identity and the national question, HIV/AIDS and national development; stability/security, displaced persons/refugees; the military and democratization etc. All these are carried out by research, organizing seminars, conferences and distinguish lecture, and disseminating research findings by publishing articles, journals and books all of which are centred on social science sphere of influence. Although, there are several others both within universities and government agencies, but the few agencies mentioned here, in consonance with its mission and vision statements, have done several development researches that contributes to national transformation.

Social sciences through their literature have helped in creating political awareness which has led to mass participation in democratic process, especially in the participation of civic duties. It has also helped in the inculcation of political skills and capabilities and in development of political culture, good governance, political structure and appreciation. These literature are the most reliable for authoritative and official information on government activities, programmes and policies. For instance, Government publications constitute a mirror of the functions of government and its agencies, instrumentalities and subventions (Mole, 2007). Since government is a two-way political system between the government and the governed, for an effective interaction of the two, the activities of the government are brought to the notice of the governed through government publications. Such publications include: Technical reports, reports of committees and commissions, audio-visual materials etc.

Planners and economists rely heavily on statistical reports to plan and project into the future. Inadequate use of statistics could lead to false or wrong planning. E.g. population of Nigeria. Annual Reports of Miniseries, Departments and Quasi-governmental Organizations; are used to determine their level of performance. Comparison can be made over the years to determine factors responsible for levels of performance as a guide for improvement. Annual reports also serve as guide to organizations etc alike.

Annual volumes of laws, gazettes, bills, statues, parliamentary debates are good companions to lawyers and others who are interested in the development of legislation. Even politicians, political scientists, and researchers constantly consult parliamentary debates for self education and information on current political issues in the country.

Many nations of the world today are culturally heterogenous both along geographical and chronological line. Social sciences literature is a veritable scholarly channel for communicating cultural information and therefore, a tool for horizontal and vertical cultural integration.

The importance of the bible, quaran and other religious literature has remained unquestionable to adherents of the various religions. Religion permeates every aspect of our private and national life, our interaction with one another and the society at large. Through religious literature, religion has functioned as an agent of socialization process, moral direction, social control, emotional satisfaction, custodian of traditional culture, solution to social problems, improvement of quality of life and consequently contribute to national transformation.

The high prevalence of crime in Nigeria today could be attributed to ignorance and lack of appreciation of basic customs and traditions as well as negative belief systems of individuals and ignorance of dignity of human lives. This has resulted in negative attitude among members of various ethnic groups and religions. Literature which abound in the area of sociology and anthropology have the potential to provide moral direction, social control, custodian of customs and tradition, solution to social problems, understanding of self esteem and dignity of human lives and no doubt contribute to national transformation.

Inherent Challenges

There is an interface between social science research and the policy-making process. Critics complain that academic knowledge does not easily or necessarily translate to practical wisdom and action because of the many defects in the methods of generating, communicating and utilizing this knowledge (Bathgeber, 1988; MacNeil, 1990). Research tends to be supply-driven and not demand-driven. Now governments, donor agencies and private sector interests are becoming impatient with social science research and learning not related or only remotely related to the practical problems of development.

Social science research is often carried out in a fragmented and narrow discipline-based manner, and results, often influenced by ideological differences among feuding scholars, are usually ambiguous, inconclusive and sometimes even contradictory (Fagan, 2003). Findings are typically too critical, offering few concrete suggestions or clear options to guide policy choices. The quality of scholarship and of the knowledge generated is now constrained by the limited exposure of our social scientists to current literature and modern analytical techniques, and their isolation from global discourse and trends in their fields as well as lack of sponsorship to research.

Besides, social science scholars often tend to communicate only among themselves or with their captive student audience/market. The research findings that do emerge (for what they are worth) have very restricted circulation and adoption, as information is not widely publicized to get to where it is needed. Admittedly, the high level of illiteracy and the technical and logistical problems of publishing impose severe limits on the extent to which social science research findings can be disseminated.

Policy-makers and politicians are usually under pressure to get results quickly, while good research tends to be more systematic, reflective and slow. Social science researchers do not sufficiently anticipate problems and prescribe measures, and there appears to be very little link between the process of doing research and the implementation of research findings. As well, Policy-makers are asking for policy-

relevant research and knowledge generated and sustained in the context of application, and not developed first and then applied to that context later by a different group of practitioners (Gibbon, 1998).

Policy-makers and practitioners on the demand side also create problems for the co-operation that should exist between them and social science researchers. They often seem to regard social science research contemptuously as esoteric, and as not taking into account the politics and economics of policy-making, which involve reconciling conflicting social and commercial interests. Besides, there has been considerably incoherence and many inconsistencies in the policy-making process in governments, resulting from frequent changes of government and policy directions. Such frequent change in government and policies often render results and literature emanating from social science researches insignificant and invalid.

Worse still, most bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and their aid programmes often have heavily funded consultancy components that employ tens of thousands of foreign experts'. Sometimes this pattern of technical assistance reinforces the problems of dependency as it underrates local knowledge, and undermines the local capacity-building efforts. The consultancy-dominated approach to aid and development cooperation has been heavily criticized for being ineffective, and for its tendency to find local problems to suit pre-packaged assumptions and solutions rather than empirically ascertain the local perceptions of what the problems and priorities are, and incorporate local knowledge and expertise in the process of solving the problems (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 1998; Mkandawire, 1998; Mascelli & Sottas, 1996).

General Recommendations For Repositioning The Social Sciences For National Transformation

Obviously, there is a need to consider the updating of the methods of social science research in order to enhance its status and improve its social relevance and impact.

Social science research should not be carried out in a fragmented and narrow discipline-based manner, and results should be clear and unambiguous. Findings of social science research should offer adequate concrete suggestions or clear options to guide policy choices. The concern of social science researcher should not be the discipline he belongs to but those national problems and issues requiring urgent attention.

Social scientists should be exposed to adequate and current literature and modern analytical techniques, and should not be isolated from global discourse and trends in their fields. This can be achieved through sponsorships of researches as well as sponsorship to conferences. Social scientists should not only align themselves and their programmes with national transformation goals, but should also press for a greater role in the policy-making process, and take a more active interest in the implementation of their research findings.

It is still imperative to improve on the system of documentation, and the dissemination channels in order to help feed research findings into the national press and information system. This could be done in simple, non-technical and user-friendly language, without the jargon, graphs and methodologies' that non-specialists sometimes

find irritating. Simple-language newsletters, research abstracts/findings, executive summaries, working and discussion papers as well as the regular calendars and annual reports of institutions of higher education and social science research institutes would be helpful in this regard (Dankckwor, 1990 Zeleza, 1997; MacNeil,1990).

Objective and scientifically based research findings may turn 'out to be politically awkward or commercially inconvenient to these various vested interests. For this reason it is common for government or business interests to hire their own consultants or set up their own commissions of inquiry or task forces (suitably composed), with specified terms of reference, to look into this or that matter, and provide policy advice. Such a report is then vetted, and a 'white paper issued to guide official decisions and action. In fact, the 1988 Civil Service Reform in Nigeria requires government ministries to set up their own research and policy analysis unit within the ministries, rather than get involved in the complications of academic research (Ikpi & Olayemi, 1997).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to examine the role social sciences literature play in national transformation. To achieve this; the paper defined the constructs of the topic which are: social science, social science literature and the core disciplinary fields such as anthropology, sociology, economics, psychology, political science and geography. The concept of social sciences was looked at from two perspectives: as a field of academic scholarship that explores aspects of human society, and as a major knowledge base that uses scientific methods to study society. The concept of national transformation was examined from the perspective of the various schools of thought in development, while the various arguments put forth indicate that national transformation is a gamut of social, economic, political and cultural change.

However, the study has revealed that for effective national transformation through the social sciences, the social sciences literature are indispensable. The role of social science literature to national development is catalytic. It is the fulcrum on which society is examined and the tools used by policy makers to advance the course of society's advancement. Thus, this paper has examined the specific contributions social sciences literature plays in national transformation, the challenges and the strategies for repositioning the social sciences for national transformation through the social sciences literature.

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