

LIVE Q & A | Doing Research Assessment in Nigeria

These are live questions and answers, from the webinar, 'Doing Research in Nigeria: bridging the research gap and improving development policies' held on 8 Sept 2020, based on the results of the Doing Research assessment in Nigeria. The answers have been edited for clarity, and to maintain anonymity. The answers are provided by the team that worked on the DRA report in Nigeria.

Q. A question for NACETEM about agenda setting. Could you explain a bit more about how this agenda setting and resource allocation takes place?

A. Each university has autonomy to design what they do. The research institutes, which are nested under specific government institutions, derive their research focus from the mother-institutions. Donor-funded research is usually pre-defined. Other funding agencies, like TETFUND, define specific research agenda for which they give funding.

Q. How does this event apply to students, especially undergraduates who are not of the social science field?

A. General learning, among others. In this day and age, the gap between separate disciplines is disappearing and the social sciences are very central and critical to development generally.

Q. Can you give some specific examples of what you heard from the stakeholders during the interviews in terms of increasing demand for high quality research among policy actors?

A. As we mentioned in the presentation, the nature of incentives is connected to the quality of research. Changing the incentive structure to reward quality, in addition to number of publications, will be a step in the right direction. Demanding clear uptake plans as part of research calls is another useful action point.

Q. The study seemed to have missed research institutes across the country.

A. We included a few research institutes (RIs). One of the issues in the system is that the stakeholders are poorly mapped. Another issue is that most visible RIs are not relevant for social science research. However, we sampled 5 RIs, from which we selected 50 researchers and 10 research administrators.

Q. Were Think Tanks included in your sample?

A. Think Tanks are part of the Private Sector/CSO category, based on the way they are registered. In the Nigerian context, a variety of organisations can fit into the definition of a Think Tank, including research institutes, private consultancies, among others.

Q. Do you have a better estimate for the share of social science researchers from your own study (10-50% is very wide and as you mentioned based on dated existing reports and secondary data)

A. Unfortunately no. A reliable estimate would require close to a census, which we did not do.

Q. What can we do now to send these findings to STI groups in Nigeria?

A. As an initial step I would get these findings out via the Science Granting Council network - there is plenty of interest as this (DRA) project and the KSI project Andy Frost led both presented at the meeting in Dar es Salaam last November.

Q. Is there a platform to promote collaboration, that is a database for researchers to network and find potential collaborators?

A. The Nigerian social science research system is quite fragmented. Central coordination of the entire system is one of the major recommendations emerging from the study. However, researchers do collaborate for research and there are existing communities of practice such as the Nigerian Academy of Science and the Young Academy of Science, which facilitate interactions and collaboration among their members.

Q. Did the study consider the issue of poor access to indexed journals by local researchers? Is there a link between researchers' low levels of access to those journals and their willingness/ability to publish in them?

A. Access to indexed journals isn't integrally part of the methodology that we followed. What we know generally is that access to data, especially secondary data, is a problem in our system, and of course that limits researchers' possibilities in terms of quality of publications, which, in turn, largely determines publication outlets.

Q. Was there any difference in research output between researchers in research institutes and university researchers who only use 30% on research?

A. Even though our sample drew more researchers from the universities than the research institutes, our analysis considered researchers as a definite group of actors. In terms of productivity, however, we cannot say researchers in the universities are more productive than their counterparts in the research institutes, on the average.

Q. There is no research council or policy in the country. These two issues have been on the 'front' burner for a longer time. Various research institutions across the country have tried unsuccessfully to get the government to create a council for over a decade. The National Research Commission (NARICOM) was suggested in many of their resolutions and communications with the federal government and various negotiating

committees set up by the government. The policy was also suggested on several occasions but the federal government has never paid any attention to this. So it is quite surprising that researchers are saying these exist. Probably they do not know or otherwise.

A. Yes, in the survey some of the respondents did say a research council existed. Those respondents may have referred to the Social Sciences Council of Nigeria (SSCN). We gathered from our desk review and key informant interviews that this organization – which was founded in the early eighties and held its first General Assembly in 1983 with support from UNESCO – is a self-organized community of practice comprising eminent social science scholars in Nigeria. It functions in a similar but much less visible manner as the Nigerian Academy of Science. By definition, the organization is independent of government and does not play any coordinating role in the SSR system in Nigeria.

Q. There is a likelihood that there are more social science researchers, since the study did not consider researchers outside the university system. There are a good number of social science researchers in government research institutes across the country. For example there are over 70 such research institutes and many have social researchers.

A. Actually we considered non-university researchers. The main point is that no matter how many they are, they're still not going to be anywhere near the number in universities. As the report indicates, the numbers are largely representative of the system but may not necessarily have counted every single social science researcher. Our estimates, however, included all researchers in the system, not only those in the universities.

Q. The disconnect between policy makers and researchers is a general problem in the global south, and recently a number of institutions from the global north linked up with some of their counterparts in the global south to develop a framework to engage both actors in research processes. It was hosted during the recent Development Studies Association Conference 2020.

Q. It's great to say that there is high collaboration; It would have been interesting to conduct bibliometric analysis to see the nature, field, and strength of collaboration in social science in Nigeria. Did you do this or would you consider this?

A. Indeed that's an interesting point. We considered it but also needed to limit scope in order to remain broadly relevant. Detailed bibliometrics is quite focused and is best undertaken in its own right.

Q. Is there a platform to promote collaboration, that is a database for researchers to network and find potential collaborators?

A. As far as we could tell from the study, no.

Q. I am surprised by the number of men relative to women in social sciences - does this reflect a larger number of men relative to women across the whole university research system

A. Yes.