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The Mass Media as a Powerful and Indispensable Instrument of Governance
By Rev. Fr. Pius O. Umekwelu (Ph. D.)

The Committee System in Local Governments and Grassroots Democracy in Nigeria
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The Preliminary Survey of French Administration Structures
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Local Government Employee Training in Nigeria:
Overcoming the Elephanting Problem
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Financial and Administrative Control in the Nigerian Civil Service
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The Public Service and Industrial Conflict in Nigeria
Preliminary Survey
By Angwor, Efeonye L.
This paper examines the status, contemporary problems and utility of social research in policy formulation in Nigeria. The paper contends that social science knowledge in Nigeria has grown tremendously, especially since the proliferation of Universities and the establishment of social science related research centres. In addition, social scientists have been called upon to contribute to the policy process either as members of political executives at federal, state and local government levels or as members of advisory or investigating committees and commissions. The above condition notwithstanding, and considering that the relevance of social science research in the development of public policy is obvious, we still argue that the utility of social science research is marginal when policy making is at issue. This, the paper argues, is due to the less than satisfactory information storage system and the attendant problem of accessibility, high cost of research, among other problems. Some specific cases are used in the paper to make the point more appreciable.

The paper believes, however, that if a number of measures are adopted the future of social science research and its appropriate utility is prosperous. In this direction, some measures including the establishment and effective management of social science data bank; entrenchment of Management Information System (MIS) in the relevant points, and increased funding of journals and conferences, were suggested.
The excitement of the social sciences is the hope that the world can be improved with social science knowledge. The natural sciences have created widespread prosperity for a considerable portion of the earth’s people. But as Finsterbusch and Motz (1980) note, environmental, political, social, and psychological problems continue to plague both the rich and the poor countries. Therefore, the question arises, can the rapidly developing social sciences help improve the quality of life? The answer remains in the affirmative to the extent that the efforts of social scientists in research are encouraged by appropriate utilization of research information by policy makers.

Although this work goes beyond concept clarification, we crave the indulgence of readers for indulging in the familiar pastime of concept clarifications. We begin with public policy. Public policy refers to the guidelines that decision makers have selected in order to manage an aspect of societal affairs. It is, according to Carl Frederich (1963:79)...

A policy usually has a process which is made up of the following stages: policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. Policy formulation, which is the focus of this work, has four distinct steps viz, problem identification, development of alternative, analysis of alternatives, and selection of one alternative. Public policies are usually made to solve varieties of problems including social problems. And a social problem is a situation that many people consider adverse or intolerable in its effects on a large number of people over a period of time.

Social science research is about human beings. Despite differences in points of emphasis, methodological approaches and allegiance to...
applied or pure sociology, social scientists see the world as composed of human beings living in groups and organized into social systems, which include organizations, institutions, and nations. By virtue of interacting with others, the individual becomes a social being, a person who shares the way of life of the society he or she lives in. The content of social research is, therefore, almost always directed towards solving human problems in the society. Since public policies and social research share common goals of solving specific problems in the society and improving the lot of the citizens, it becomes important for both policy makers and social scientists to have a meeting point. The problem, therefore, is how far this meeting point have been achieved, facilitated and appreciated? Do policy makers pay any respect to social science research? Of what use and impact is social science research? What is the major contributing factor in implementation gap and problems in Nigeria?

This is why there is a compelling urge to investigate the extent to which social science research is utilized by policy makers in Nigeria. The aim of this paper is therefore, to examine the status, contemporary problems and utility of social science research in policy formulation in Nigeria. Part of the task of this paper will be to suggest mitigative measures aimed at uplifting the status and utility of social science research by policy makers in Nigeria. We shall rely heavily on secondary data in this study and will depend on content analysis for our calculations.

2. Policy Roles For Social Scientists

What role can the social scientist play in the policy process? C. Wright Mills (1959), the outspoken advocate of action-oriented research by sociologists, identified three roles for social scientist in the public sphere: philosopher-king, independent philosopher, and adviser to the king. In the first role, the social scientist occupies a position of power and is also extraordinarily knowledgeable. This role is rather rare in any part of the world. In the second role, the social scientist remains
ependent, does his own work, selects his own problems, but directs work at kings as well as the publics. Most social scientists assume the third role - adviser to the king. They are technicians who provide information useful to others. The "adviser" is generally a bureaucratic official, who may call on social scientists temporarily, intermittently, or full time. This situation is true in Nigeria. Although the adviser will probably work in local, state, or federal government offices or one of the many contracting firms serving both the public and private sector, it is not uncommon for them to be located in a university, educational institution and planning agencies. No matter where they are called upon or where they work, advisers usually provide a broad range of information as needed to perform a variety of sundry tasks. The services that social scientists may provide in their role as adviser to the king can be classified as:

i. Sociological perspective - a research which attempts to fathom what fosters continuity and change, orderliness and chaos in the human being and in the human group.

ii. Supportive services which involve fact-finding, social accounting and planning.

iii. Social problem analysis. This involves research designed to learn what the 'real' nature of social problem is and then how to solve it.

iv. Social Impact Assessment (SIA), which is a research involved in assessing the potential social consequences of an intended policy on the quality of life of a given population. It may also involve a policy which has already been implemented; and
Evaluation research done generally after a policy has been established and the programme is in operation.

Although these varieties of research are not mutually exclusive, they represent the major categories of research and where the social scientist role are located in the policy process in considerable number of cases take the rational decision making model which steps are as follows: (a) specify goals, (b) identify alternative courses of action for achieving these goals, (c) establish criteria for evaluating alternatives (d) measure the alternatives on the valuative criteria, and (e) select an alternative according to some decision rule. In the rational model decision-making model, the social scientists could contribute significantly by determining which problems need to be addressed, helping to formulate policies to solve these problems, measuring the impacts of alternative public policies on individual and collective, and evaluating policies and programmes already in effect. The steps of the roles of the social researcher are therefore, as follows:

Step 1 - The social problem: A negative social condition
Step 2 - Policy Action (1): Call for action, request social research
Step 3 - Social research (1): Social problem analysis
Step 4 - Policy Action (II): Developing solutions
Step 5 - Social Research (II): Social Impact Assessment (SIA)
Step 6 - Policy Action (III): Choice of solution
Step 7 - Social Research (III): Evaluation research
Step 8 - Policy Action (IV): Revision, institutionalization, or rejection of policy.

3. Social Science Research in Retrospect

University education took off in Nigeria only in the late 1940s. Even at that, Universities hardly recognized the need for or the place of
social science as a discipline of study. This late take-off and recognition of social science is complicated with the fact that even in developed countries the discipline of social sciences grows very slowly. The slow growth is associated with the fact that the variables of the discipline are difficult to identify, define, measure, and predict than those associated with the physical phenomena. This difficulty emanates from the fact that all social sciences have human beings as point of reference and it is a common knowledge that the behaviour and responses of human beings accord with their individual differences and, therefore, become difficult to calculate and predict, even when the conditions are held constant.

Social science, according to Lerche (1981), came to Nigeria in the wake of colonialism. The first University - the University College Ibadan was founded by the British. The University of Nigeria Nsukka is American-oriented. Indeed when the study of social science started in Nigeria, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, British and American trained scientists dominated the scene. With due respect to their efforts and contributions, we say that their cultural, values and attitudes as well as subject matter were not congruent with ours. But these were carried over into the system of higher education. These foreign values sufficiently influenced the budding indigenous social scientists, and hence social research then.

At the early stage of social science in Nigeria concern was given to what was current in Europe and America. It was indeed fashionable to do so. This was also true of the theories and methodology. Even after social science, faculties were largely indigenized. Barongo (1979) explains the situation thus: "Western domination of our curricula and research orientations can be seen to arise from two sources, namely, the continued reliance on western literature as a reservoir of teaching material, and the fact that a substantial proportion of the present university teachers of the social sciences are themselves products of western Universities, many of whom have persisted to look to their professors, research supervisors, and western academic community as a whole, for collaboration, affinity and guidance. Consequently, the
orientation of our teaching and research programmes has tended to continue to be drawn within the framework of the tradition of western scholarship. It may perhaps be for this reason that Adamolekun (1981.165) opined that:

the curricula of social science disciplines in the universities as well as the research interests of the social science teachers are heavily influenced by the developments in American and British Universities. To the extent that knowledge is universal, there is nothing bad in this state of affairs. However, the critical point is that social science knowledge is centred on man and the behaviour of man, his problems, preoccupations vary significantly under different cultures. In other words, knowledge that is and should be recognised as culture-specific.

These views about the state of social science research and knowledge at the beginning is evidenced by the content and direction of research then. For instance, Lerche (1981.12) took a look at the back issues of the Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, the publication of which started in 1959 at Ibadan, and stated that:

though it [the journal] has a certain latitude in subject matter, its primary interest is applied research relevant to Nigerian Development. With very few exceptions the research presented relies heavily, if not exclusively on western techniques such as surveys, econometrics and so on, and draws on western theories for explanation.

A look at The Quarterly Journal of Administration, the median publication of which was in 1967 at Ife also confirms Lerche's assertion. Although the Institute of Administration, whose publication the journal is stated clearly that 'Neither the Institute nor the University necessarily shares the views expressed in the journal, the publications in the journal between 1967 and 1973 bear out the fact that they were not only dominated and inflicted with foreign ideas, but foreigners contributed articles significantly in those volumes. For
example, out of the seven contributors of the Journal’s, volume V number 2 of January 1971 five were foreigners. Besides, some of the recommendations that ran across in the volumes regarding development strategies were rather not relevant to the Nigerian situation. This is for the known reason that what constitutes development for a society may not be the same for another, especially in developing countries.

Related to the above situation, the interest of government in establishing social research outfits was slow. It was only in 1976 that a research-related centre was created. This was the defunct National Policy and Development Centre (NPDC). Even at that, the Centre’s function as charged was general and not related to social sciences alone. The functions were:

i. To undertake policy research and analysis of interest of Federal Military Government;

ii. To develop new ideas and policy;

iii. to suggest new dimensions to existing policies;

iv. To conduct indept studies of the economy and society generally, and

v. To review Government policies and measures from time to time and to draw attention to those inconsistent with overall Government objectives.

The establishment of NPDC was a good beginning for social research in Nigeria. However, because of the obvious problems as can be discerned easily from the general nature of its mandate, the NPDC was ineffective. Besides, its organization was patterned after the structure of the Civil Service and it was located in the office of Head
Social Science Research & Policy Formulation in Nigeria: Retrospect & Prospect

4. Contemporary Status of Social Science Research in Nigeria

In spite of the picture that is painted above and the obvious problems encountered by Nigerian pioneer social researchers, social science research has grown tremendously, especially since the last two decades. The increase in the number of Universities in Nigeria is one of the main reasons for the growth. As at now there are thirty six Universities made up as follows:

- Federal universities: 16
- Federal Universities of Technology: 5
- Federal Universities of Agriculture: 3
- State Universities: 9
- State Universities of Technology: 3

Additionally, there are five (5) Colleges of Education and one (1) Polytechnic that award degrees. All the Universities, aside from the Universities of Agriculture and some Universities of Technology, offer social sciences and/or management sciences. The teaching and research in social science that go on in these institutions are enormous. It is from these institutions that most resource persons are drawn for national, state, and private assignments that address social problems.

Unlike in the 1970s, most social scientists train in the local universities and are, therefore, compelled to carry out research in the relevant environment and with the relevant people. Consequently, the contemporary Nigerian social scientists are reconsidering their scholarly orientation in the light of an increasing awareness of cultural specificity of many of the theories and techniques of western social
science. This orientation towards social problems in the environment is reflected in the various journals, books, monographs and other scholarly materials now available in the Universities. Most of the conferences, workshops are increasingly thematic, and the themes always address social problems and development issues. For example, since 1978, the Quarterly Journal of Administration has focused mainly on problems of policy making, social research, management, etc. in Nigerian Administration. From 1983 - 1987, the Nigerian Journal of Public Administration and Local Government (NJPALG), published by the Sub-Department U.C.N. never failed to make the development and survival of Nigerian local government system its major focus. The same applies to the Nigerian Journal of Local Government studies, published at OAU, Ile-Ife. The case studies in JIE PSCHOLOGY, An International Journal are also thematically focused on Nigerian problems.

Closely related to the above is the fact that conferences and workshops are becoming significantly relevant in the Nigerian academic realm. Gone are the days when it was the Nigerian Economic Society that enjoyed national and international attention and recognition. Other professional bodies such as the Gender Study Team (GST), Nigerian Environmental Study Team (NEST), Nigerian Political Science Association, Nigerian Psychological Association, etc. are not only attracting attention, but also enjoying support from local and foreign agencies. The outcomes of their conferences and workshops are not only rich but also relevant when social problems in Nigeria are at issue. It is probably the recognition of the drift and content of social research in Nigeria that informs the current tendency of foreign agencies to buy up back and current issues of Nigerian journals.

The increase in number and standard of social science-related research centres has also given a boost to the status of social science research in Nigeria. Some of them are located in the Universities e.g. Centre for Social and Economic Research (CSER), Institute of Development Studies (IDN). Some others operate within the framework of Universities, e.g. Social Science Council of Nigeria. Others are pure government outfits, e.g. Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic
Research and Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS). Thanks to external bodies which help to fund research undertaken by these institutions. For example, the Ford Foundation is currently pecuniarily supporting Social Science Council of Nigeria (SSCN) in its research endeavours. The World Bank is supporting many, including an on-going research on institutional and non-institutional framework for poverty alleviation in rural areas in Nigeria. Worthy of mention is the remarkable part the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) based in Dakar, Senegal, is playing in the direction of research in Nigeria and other countries in the sub-region. It is not only extending grants to scholars but also trying to improve their research skills and interest, in addition to organizing international conferences.

These developments make us feel that the period of copious reference and unstudied adoption of western-oriented experiments and models is ending. It is rational to question the utility, in Nigeria, of Hawthorne Experiments, Scientific Management School, Theory X and Y, etc., and even foreign-developed methodologies. Some of these theories and methods are not appropriate to the socio-economic realities of Nigeria.

5. Utility of Social Science Research in Policy Formulation

The need for using social science research results and information has been long recognized by policy makers in Nigeria. This need came to significance as far back as 1975 when the NPDC was established. The shortcomings of the organization had earlier been mentioned in section 3 of this paper. The activities of the National Planning Commission also bear this out. Government has been supporting external funded research in principle and has also been practically sponsoring others. Besides, majority of the Universities are government-owned. The assumption is that research funds are provided for their use. As for the social scientists themselves, their recognition and appropriate placement in sensitive government positions or policy making status is no longer questionable. They abound in the Executive Councils (State
Several research findings have contributed to the base of some policies. For example, rural development policies are based on considerable social research co-ordinated by the National Centre for Research and Training for Rural Development in Nigeria. The same applies to the National Population Policy. It was informed by a good number of surveys sponsored by government and external bodies. The establishment of some ministries and government outfits like Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development, Ministry of Women Affairs, National Orientation Agency (NOA), etc, are based on calls from social scientists and social researchers. Policy-makers are known to rely considerably on recommendations from the Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) when making policies bordering on politics. Recommendations of such nature are contingent upon research findings by CDS and related endeavours.

The Local Government system has also grown to its present status through the various contributions of social scientists. The 1976 remarkable Local Government Reform which has placed the local governments in their modern state benefited from the contributions of social scientists. The Reform committee headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki had a preponderance of social scientists who brought their knowledge to bear on the assignment. The Reform represents a radical change for good in the local government system today. Still on the local governments, the presidential system tried between 1991 and 1993 was based on the recommendations by Social Scientists and the outcome of national workshops. C.E. Emesi (1984) had, after taking a look at the Nigerian Local Government in historical perspective recommended, among others, the introduction of Executive Chairmanship of the local governments for congruency with the presidential system. There were many other concordant voices. The National Conference on Local Government and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria held at University of Nigeria, Nsukka also strongly recommended the introduction of the presidential system in the local
governments in Nigeria. The system was tried in the local government in Nigeria from 1991-1993.

Many more social scientists are being engaged in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA). These Impact Assessments inform policy directions. In 1992, the EIA carried out by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development utilized several social scientists. Indeed it was compulsory that each team should hire an experienced social scientist to work with other scientists. The EIA of Lower Anambra Irrigation Project is a typical case. The feasibility in Taraba State, included social scientists. These studies, which took place in 1994, required that the social scientists in the teams look at the demography and infrastructural disposition of the areas likely to be affected by the dams and to make recommendations as to the effect of the dam projects on the inhabitants and the precautions to be employed in respect of welfare of the people. Indeed, the feasibility studies preceding the design of Enugu Township Water Supply Scheme currently (1997) being undertaken by Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) required input from social scientists on landuse, demography and socio-economic information of Enugu and environs. The author's services were extensively consulted in this regard.

The examples of the recognition of the utility of social science knowledge are endless, but that does not show really that its recognition is overwhelming. In many other areas, example in the agricultural sectors, social science research is treated as peripheral issue. According to Usoro (1981:148), government has recognised the importance of biological and engineering sciences, but as he said

the same cannot be said for social science research in relation to development of agriculture. By the minds of policy makers, the nature of rural social structures, institutions and social dynamics are treated as peripheral issues.
The same can also be said about policies relating to technology. They hardly take the nature of the users into play. This is why there are implementation gaps between policies. For instance, the negative effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on the people and lack of adequate measures to counter the effects show that a thorough home-work was not done at the formulation stage. It is no longer a radical view to say that SAP has aided the pauperisation of the generality of people. SAP has gender dimension in that it is particularly unfavourable to women and especially female-headed households, because of unprecedented unemployment and the crumbling of infrastructures that provide social services. We may not have conceived this at the beginning of the programme.

This peripheral treatment accorded to social research information is also made clearer in the emphasis government places on Engineering and other physical sciences when feasibility or valuative research is commissioned. The number and even the rating of social scientists are always lower than those of other scientists who, at times, spend less number of days in the field. This is why it is now a crusade for social scientists to assert not only their rights but also their equal importance in every collaborative research endeavours.

6. Problems Associated with the Utility of Social Research.

a. The method of data collection in social research in Nigeria is still patterned after western developed and oriented researcher. We think that this creates utility gap. Social science research replicability is known to be difficult even in the same environment because of variability of human behaviours. The situation becomes more unfortunate if we consider replicating research in other cultures. Questionnaires, including mail questionnaires, for instance, could work in New York but their workability in Nigeria, especially in rural areas, is doubtful. Moreover, sophisticated methods
are not the best for our situation. To the extent that inappropriate method is being used, to that extent would research result prove to be difficult to use.

Another problem is associated with the time gap between feasibility studies, research findings and time of policy formulation. Information used for policy formulation is stale. A typical national example is the continuous use of 1963 population figures upon which projections are made. Policy makers use research findings and feasibility studies made more than five years back as basis for public policy formulations. It is wrong because social data change from time to time and in keeping with changes in the environment. The use of such outdated data leads to implementation gap. Such situations result to inability to implement a given policy fully.

Lack of congruence between time of information and their utility presents problems of dependability of such information as societal needs, for example, are always changing.

Storage and accessibility of social research findings are also twin problems affecting the utility of social science research. Research information is not systematically stored in Nigeria. There are few data banks at the national level. At the state and local government level, the story is a sad one. Most local governments do not have base data on which further research is built. It takes a researcher the tedious process of going through old files and going to traditional rulers and elders to obtain information on rural areas. We all know how unreliable such information is. Even researchers in the Universities rely on storing and retrieving information in journals. Very few policy-makers will take the pains of using such mechanical methods.

Allied with the above is the high cost of producing academic journals, contributing to journals, attending a conference and publishing. The trend is that a scholar would virtually pay for giving out his
knowledge. It takes a huge sum of money to get a place in journals, and takes much more to attend conferences and present papers. The trend is discouraging, especially at this time when salaries make little meaning to an average worker.

The above problems become relevant if policy makers consider social research findings when making policies. It is not contradictory to note that even though policy makers recognise the need to utilise social research findings in policy making, this could be in principle only. There is still the unfounded bias against research information and the tendency to look at such information as too radical and merely a classroom exercise. Where such is the case, the most important problem exists.

7. Towards Effective Utilization of Social Science Research in Policy Formulation

The mitigative measures hereunder recommended for effectiveness of the utilization of social science research will be put in two parts. The first part would be for the researchers, while the second part would be for policy makers. The measure are not, however, mutually exclusive to any group.

A. For Scholars:

Social research for policy issue should possess the following distinctive attributes:

(a) it should be action-oriented - that is, its relevance to problem resolution should be explicit;
(b) it should be time-bound. Social research for policy making should be undertaken to contribute to decision-making in the immediate future, and should be for definite period;
(c) findings, implications, and recommendations must be communicated so that the audience will understand the message and will want and be able to act on the
(d) researchers should encourage and entertain collaborative research. Such research would make for better ideas and improved methodology. Collaborative research with other universities, research centres and even ministries is a case in point here;

(e) there is need for social scientists to come together, more often to fashion out effective methods that would be relevant to Nigeria’s problems, and research instruments that would really tap the desired responses and put the variables in their proper perspective.

B. For Policy Makers

(a) The level of funding for research in the universities and research institutes is low, especially for social sciences research. A situation where foreign agencies sponsor most of the researchers, including social research is not healthy for policy. Funding budget should be taken seriously and funds should always be released timely so that time-bound research will be realised. In addition, this would facilitate the production of journals and other scholarly collections where research information is stored,

(b) at the institutional level, the authorities should re-visit the issue of sponsoring conference attendance and standardize it. In some universities, conferences are sponsored on presentation of invitation letters, in others, it is not so. We are aware of the in-built allowance for such but, as we have earlier noted, the allowance is no longer meaningful considering the cost.

(c) The National Planning Commission and other relevant ministries should put out adequate and nation-wide
information on research needs and calls. This would make for a balanced input. The situation where only a few scholars are regarded as consultants would not yield the correct effect for policy making. The list of their consultants should be reviewed from time to time and should reflect the national character.

The storage and accessibility problems of social science research information will be highly improved upon if the Management Information System (MIS) is fully introduced in the universities, research centres, headquarters or secretariats of professional bodies, ministries and local governments. The MIS is not only a sure way of planning but a better way of storing research information on demography, pattern of life, trends, base information and the country's profile. Government is called upon to establish the MIS in local governments so as to facilitate access to information by both government and researchers and also serve as a storage for the local government profile. MIS is in a bad state in Nigeria to the extent that information on Nigeria is more abundant and accessible in USA and Britain than in Nigeria. The only meaningful MIS that could provide good social information is the National Data Bank (NGB) of the National Planning Commission, sponsored by UNDP. Its prototypes in all states and local governments would improve project management and research information for policy making.

It is, therefore, our recommendation that the MIS should be strengthened and its establishments consummated in all universities and research centres. The local governments should also have such facilities because information on the true situation of the people are at best at the grassroots. The National Planning Commission, in its new form, has assumed the role of MIS in local governments.
Data Bank should establish and coordinate points all over the country for effective storage, accessibility and utilization of social science research information.

8. Conclusion

The social sciences can make valuable contributions to policy studies and decision-making process. They provide perspective that serves to remind decision makers that the ultimate objective of their actions is to improve the quality of human life. The social scientist knows how to identify and assess social factors that are germane to the policy being formulated. This is why we regard him as an adviser to the king in our framework.

We have seen in this paper that social science research has grown considerably inspite of many odds. The recognition for its use by policy-makers has also grown. Indeed, social research is utilized by policy makers in the policy process but there are still considerable gaps. We trace this gap to inadequate and unwholesome consultations at the policy formulation stage. Part of the problems which contribute to poor utility of social science research information is traceable to inadequate storage of research information, high cost of research, lack of base data for social research, inadequate co-ordination between researchers and policy-makers, etc.

In order to realise the desired end by both policy-makers and social science researchers, a number of recommendations, including the entrenchment into the system of the Management Information System MIS, are made. In all phases of policy research, the social scientist generally blends a humanistic perspective with relatively objective research methods and awareness of the Nigerian value system with scientific knowledge. The social scientists should be encouraged to carry out more and more qualitative research to aid in making decisions today for tomorrow.
References


