

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This study reviewed the literature on International Research Collaboration and National Development. A country is said to be developed when it is able to provide good social amenities to its citizens. Developing countries are still trying to provide for the needs of their citizenry. Nations need to carry out international research collaborations in order to attain the goal of becoming a truly developed country. International research collaboration covers consultations, advice, site visits, conferences/symposia, complementary research agendas, joint research projects, sharing of research facilities, access to research data and discoveries, graduate student exchange programs and faculty exchange between international counterparts. When this is done, there will be positive benefits accruing to countries for sustainable development in this 21st century.

Keywords: International Research Collaboration, National development and Social services

Background to the Study

National development is the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people by providing social amenities like good education, infrastructure, medical care and social services. Developed countries have taken great strides to ensure that its citizenry enjoy good social amenities. They are leaders in most scientific, technological and social infrastructure. In contrast most developing countries are still backwards in their developmental efforts. They have problems in providing good education, medical and infrastructural facilities for their citizens. This has highly impeded national development in these countries. Thus researchers have examined the effect of different constructs in improving Nations to be truly developed. In line with this, Articles (2013) and Satbir (2014) studied the importance of Education on National Development; Maharey (2004)

discussed the role of research in National Development. Other researchers (Thomas and Wellings, 2008; Katz and Martin, 1997 ;) have studied this construct in developed nations but there is paucity of literature in the developing countries such as Nigeria. The focus of this paper therefore is to look at the effect of international research collaboration on national development in a bid to bring about improvements in Nigeria developmental strides.

What Is International Research Collaboration?

Collaboration is a natural part of academic life. Collaborations results in sharing and transfer of knowledge, skills and techniques which brings about more effective utilization of talents (Katz and Martin, 1997). Research collaborations could be between individuals, groups, institutions, sectors or nations (Katz and Martin, 1997). Researchers share ideas, information and techniques to improve the knowledge base of countries. International research collaboration according to AUCC (2009:1) simply means “when researchers engage informally in consultations, provide advice, participate in site visits, conferences or create complementary research agendas. Other, deeper forms of cooperation include joint research projects, the sharing of research facilities and major infrastructure, allowing access to research data and discoveries, and the linking of research centres and virtual networks. Collaboration also plays a key role in the training and development of highly qualified personnel, for example through the co-supervision of Ph.D students from other countries” .

Smith and Katz (2000:11) believe that collaboration simply means 'working with someone else for a special purpose'. Collaboration therefore implies a give and take relationship. Most writers (Lee and Bozeman, 2005; Cheng et al 2013) look at collaboration in terms of co-authored publication where diverse researchers pool their knowledge to produce a paper. This is just an aspect of international collaboration because it involves more than this. International research collaboration covers consultations, advice, site visits, conferences/symposia, complementary research agendas, joint research projects, sharing of research facilities, access to research data and discoveries, graduate student exchange programs and faculty exchange between international counterparts. This scope is evidenced by the definition proffered by Thompson et al, (2007) 'Collaboration is a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions'.

International research collaboration is very important for nations to develop to their full potential as there are benefits attached to international partnerships. Sloan and Arrison (2011) reports the following as benefits in engaging in international research collaboration: it opens doors for countries which have difficult and complex political and economic relations. Researchers work together to find answers and promote human advancements; it brings about solutions to problems and help build lasting relationship which enables

nations share in the cost of research. Countries engaged in international research collaborations are able to develop higher education strategy because higher education institutions are encouraged to get accreditation from internationally recognized bodies and create conducive research environments that will attract and retain world-class researchers.

National Development

Development is very critical to the survival and growth of any nation. According to Kothari Commission (1964-66) as reported by (Satbir 2014), National Development lies in

- a) Confidence in nation
- b) Continuous rise in standard of living of masses
- c) Reduction of unemployment
- d) Equal opportunities for social, political and economic development
- e) Good and impartial administration
- f) Mutual understanding and sense of co-operation amongst masses

A country is said to be developed when it is able to provide a qualitative life for its citizens (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011), there is equitable distribution of wealth, provision of good health care, education, housing and other essential services that improves individual and collective quality of life (Naomi, 1995). Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011:238) defined National Development as “the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation”. Dike (2005) believes “The concept of national development (economic, political and social) is said to bring with it valuable and positive changes that improves the living standards of the people, as it creates employment opportunities and equality of opportunity, and reduces poverty, among other things. In particular, economic development increases the efficiency of a system in the production of goods and services to meet the basic needs of the people in a society”. From the foregoing, in a developed nation, citizens should be able to have trust in the government that they are just and equitable in providing for the needs of the people; good standard of living, infrastructural adequacy, political and religious advancement, good educational system, health care and basically a good standard of living by any comparison. For this reason, most nations develop plans which they follow in order to meet the needs and aspirations of the people in the area of development. Nigeria is no exception. Ogwumike, (1995) reported that right from inception Nigeria has tried to bring out development plans to improve the living conditions of the people. Such plans include the 1st National Development Plan of (1962 – 1968) with objectives of improving health, education and employment opportunities of citizens; 2nd National Development Plan of (1970 -1974) with objectives of improving agriculture, industry, transport, manpower, defense, electricity, communication, water supply, social services; 3rd National Development Plan of (1975 -1980) with objectives of improving rural development and revamping the agricultural sector; 4th National Development Plan of (1981 -1985) with objectives of increasing real income of average citizens, even distribution of income,

dependence on the country's material and human resources, reduction in underemployment and unemployment. All these plans were not successful because of lack of adequate financing and commitment to implementing them.

In the same vein Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) cited more developmental plans embarked by the Nigerian government which had failed such as Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolutionary Program, Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), Vision 2010, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Seven Point Agenda by the present administration. These developmental efforts by the government have failed because of corrupt leaders, non-involvement of stakeholders, mono-economic base of the country and bad leadership (Lawal and Oluwatoyin 2011). For a country to be truly developed there is need for international collaboration as the world has now become a global village. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) believe a way forward for Nigeria is to imbibe the developmental strides by Asian countries which require total commitment of leaders, stability and continuity of past policies.

International Research Collaboration and National Development

“The role of international collaborations in advancing knowledge and offering economic opportunities worldwide is growing, thanks to factors such as access to the Internet; globalization; and greater mobility of information, ideas, and people” (Sloan and Harrison, 2011). When nations form partnerships through international research efforts, they become more efficient in allocating scarce resources and building stronger community ties (Thompson et al 2007); enables organizations acquire new knowledge in improving their product innovations (Torugsa and Arundel, 2013); brings about improved quality of teaching and learning. Improved research work attracts grants from industries, foundations and international organizations (Cheng et al 2013). When people are gainfully employed in a country, it reduces unemployment, raises the standard of living and improves the social and economic life of citizens. Research collaborations help in addressing the global challenges of climate changes, infectious diseases, poverty and security. Other benefits include: assisting domestic researchers to have strategic partners who will improve research quality and reputation, thereby improving access to international labour markets (researchers and research students); improves the competitiveness of domestic economy due to access to overseas markets and attracting foreign investments (Thomas and Wellings 2008).

Policy makers rely on research findings to make substantive changes in policy (Thompson et al, 2007). When such policies are made through collaborative efforts, it is easier to get the requisite backing/support in implementing the policies. This in turn will lead to better development of nations. Paul (2008) reports how international research partnership has improved food availability in many developing world. In most developing nations, Donor agencies like the World Bank, USAID (United States Agency for International Development), Department for International Development (DFID) and so on, work in

partnership with developing countries to provide infrastructural facilities to aid national development. In the same vein Paul (2008) maintained that international research collaboration brings about mutual trust and common goals of participating countries which leads to mutually beneficial relationships. These agencies usually retain host country workers and expose them to training opportunities that makes them highly sought after. This helps in creating new businesses and improves the local economy. Thomas and Wellings (2008) report that in United Kingdom International Research Collaboration has grown from 30% in 1990 to 40% in 2005; that 10-20% of the Nation's Science budget is allocated to international research collaborations. These initiatives have improved the competitiveness and sustainability of UK domestic system; increased domestic economic growth; partners are more committed in working together to solve common problems like climate change, poverty, etc; their universities have good international standing and there is a good supply of the right caliber of researchers.

A report by AUCC (2009) highlighted how in Canada, international research collaborations have increased co-authorship to twice the world average; universities involvement has increased from 84% in 2000 to 95% in 2006. Nigeria as a country understands the importance of international collaboration in solving most of her problems – from economic, political, social, educational, religious, to technological issues. This is highlighted by several calls from policy makers and government officials on the need to embark on more collaborative efforts to bring about a more sustaining developmental effort such as: curbing Boko Haram menace on the lives and security of the country, (Koiki 2014; Usman, 2014); oil theft and pipeline vandalization (Oduaghan, 2014); for scientific and technological improvements (NISLT 2014); economic growth (Izuora, 2014) and so on. With this understanding of the benefits of international collaboration, if the policy makers are able to bring out a good blueprint on the way forward for Nigeria, then the country will be able to have a sustainable development in all specters of the economy.

Conclusion

When there is collaboration between individual, industries and institutions, different nations, etc, there will be exchange of ideas and information which will be relevant for any changes that needs to be made for development. Institutions will adapt their curriculum to fit the needs of the industry; nations will concentrate on their areas of core competencies; researchers will have richer literature and methodologies; and there will definitely be an improvement in nation's development.

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