

The Problems of African Policy Research Institutions

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Paper for the International conference

**“African Economic Research Institutions and Policy
Development: Opportunities and Challenges”**

Dakar, January 28-29, 2005

organized by the

Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa

(SISERA)

Dakar, January 2005

Abstract

This paper reviews how policy research environment has evolved Ghana from the 1970s to date. The study reveals that there is a now growing research potential in Ghana and the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER), established in 1962, influences the policy making process in country. A detailed overview of ISSER research activities is used to assess the institute work based on effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and financial viability.

The potential clientele of ISSER includes a variety of local and international clientele including the Government of Ghana - Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), the private sector, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral agencies and the development community at large. The paper suggests that if ISSER has built a strong reputation in the research communities, it still faces fundamental challenges that hinder effective co-operation between researchers and bureaucrats who are the conduit to policy makers. The last part of the paper focus on effective ways ISSER is currently working on to help bridge the gap between researchers and policy makers.

Résumé

Ce papier donne un aperçu de l'évolution de la recherche en politiques au Ghana, des années 1970s à nos jours. L'étude assure qu'il y a maintenant une nette amélioration de la capacité de recherche en politiques au Ghana avec des institutions comme l'Institut de recherche statistique, sociale et économique (ISSER) crée en 1962. Un résumé détaillé des activités de recherche de l'ISSER est utilisé pour évaluer le travail de l'institut sur la base de l'efficacité, l'efficience, la pertinence et la viabilité financière de ses activités.

La clientèle potentielle de cet institut est composée de différents groupes au niveau local et international comprenant les ministères, directions nationales et autres services du gouvernement ghanéen, le secteur privé, les ONGs, les agences bilatérales et multilatérales et l'ensemble de la communauté de développement. L'étude révèle que ISSER s'est forgé une forte réputation au sein de la communauté de recherche, mais qu'il demeure confronté à des défis fondamentaux qui entravent une collaboration effective entre les chercheurs et les bureaucrates servant d'intermédiaires avec les décideurs politiques. La dernière partie du papier se penche sur les interventions effectives à l'étude par ISSER pour combler le gap entre chercheurs et décideurs politiques.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1960s, as more and more African countries attained independence, the need to quickly put aside the legacies of their colonial past and seek new ways of promoting rapid growth and development, forced them to pay attention to the intellectual ingredients of policy making. Some had inherited universities that trained many of the required personnel for policy making as they sought to carve out new growth paths. Many others had no universities of their own. The need to have trained personnel to take over the running of the civil service became one of the most important objectives of governments. They subsequently began the process of preparing for policy support by setting up their own universities, with the expectation that those universities would not only train people, but also undertake policy research in their teaching departments. They often invited experienced policy advisers from Europe and America to work with their universities and policy institutions, as, for example Arthur Lewis and Nicholas Kaldor did for Ghana.

Towards the end of the 1960s, however, a number of countries, particularly the group of countries that had set up their own universities a little earlier (including Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania), began to expect more from the universities in terms of supporting policy with relevant research. This was happening at a time when they were getting disenchanted with progress made on the economic and social development fronts following the attainment of independence. They therefore set up within the universities policy research institutions, such as the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at Legon, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) at Ibadan, and Economic Research Bureau (ERB) at Dar es Salaam. ISSER, for example, was set up in 1969 as the research wing of the Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ghana, with support from the Ford Foundation and UNDP, to be the focal point of all policy research that would stimulate national development thinking and provide policy advice. Other countries later followed these examples of university-based research institutions, as happened with CIREs in Abidjan. In the early years of existence of these institutions, governments were keen to either directly support them or encourage donors to provide the necessary support.

By the middle of the 1970s, a number of countries were forced to confront economic hardships, often after years of mismanagement of their economies and after the oil crisis of 1973. With these, the priorities of governments changed. Their immediate survival, in the face of restive populations, became more important than the promotion of scholarship and research. The funding of research projects dried up. Staff development was curtailed as graduate training overseas became unaffordable. Research infrastructure became dilapidated as university capital budgets were slashed. By the end of the 1970s, the institutions had become empty shells, with most of their capable staff having left the countries. Little research took place at the universities, and this situation is only slowly beginning to change for the better in a number of countries.

I shall review briefly in this presentation various aspects of the problems outlined above. In section 2, I discuss broadly the policy research environment in Africa, looking at the receptiveness of governments and people to research and attitudes that influence the support or the lack of it for such research. In section 3, I describe the conditions of research institutions, looking at their capacity to develop research programmes and the various factors that influence these from within the institutions, including the conditions of researchers and their research activities. In section 4, I highlight activities at ISSER that have a bearing on the path that research institutions appear to be taking lately and how these are assessed. Section 5 concludes.

2. THE POLICY RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Following the difficulties of the late 1970s and 1980s that forced governments to devote less resource to research in general, there was a widely held perception that African governments could no longer be bothered with research. Indeed, many believed that the little

attention that research received from governments was related to the absence of strong national commitment to university-based research and research in general. This was reflected in

- growing distance between the research institutions and government agencies, as the agencies consulted researchers and research institutions less and less on policy matters, and made hardly any reference to published reports from local research institutions;
- the diminishing budgetary allocations to research institutions; and
- increasing difficulty in obtaining access to public data for research.

The view that policy research was not going to solve the immediate problems that governments faced was partly engendered by the perception that the research was not very relevant. This quotation sums up broad perceptions of the relevance of research in Africa. "Many universities in Africa are believed to be out of touch with the real developmental problems of their countries and have no machinery for ensuring that the research undertaken is of direct relevance to the development of their respective countries" (Mohammedbhai 1992, pp.144).

Another reason why governments were not supportive of policy research was that a number of researchers and research institutions were seen to have adopted anti-government positions on various policy matters, often leading to major conflicts and tensions between governments and universities. The end result was that governments showed considerable disinterest in research outcomes, a development which influenced wider perceptions among the society.

Changing Attitudes

By the middle of the 1980s, however, the attitudes once again began to change. The new change was prompted by the economic reforms that various countries had to undertake, for which they had to develop some basic analytical capacity. In the area of economic management, governments found themselves increasingly having to rely on foreign consultants for basic economic analyses at great expense. This experience forced renewed interest in having local capacity to undertake, at less expense, such analyses. By then, however, the institutions were in such bad shape that they could not simply respond to the new needs without major capacity-building and investment. The investment has been slow in coming, though. Thus, while attitudes towards policy research are more positive today the institutions are still suffering from some of the neglect of past years.

I must point out that the changing attitude has not been entirely spontaneous. Governments have often accepted local research outcomes only through third-party 'interventions'. Donor agencies have sometimes drawn the attention of policy makers to the existence of "good research" in countries from time to time, thus allowing some of that research to come into the policy debate.

Recent Initiatives

Anxious to develop the capacity of local researchers to undertake basic studies, there has been a growing role for donors as governments have not been able to find the resources for restoring the research institutions. The donor approach has been a mixture of

- facilitating the research work of capable individuals within research institutions with research grants;
- creating new centres of excellence outside of the university structures, ostensibly to protect them against interference from governments;
- creating regional networks, such as AERC and SISERA; and
- collaboration between local and foreign research institutions on specific projects.

While many of these more recent efforts to revive research have been generally welcome, and proven to have had a positive impact on the research environment, they have not necessarily solved all the major problems of research institutions. In terms of the environment for research, there is a growing perception that the research agenda of most institutions in Africa is dictated by

the research interests of northern organizations, and may not necessarily be relevant for the policy requirements of the African countries. For example, quite a bit of the serious research going on in most African institutions is the outcome of a researcher in a European university receiving a grant from a donor agency and looking for a willing collaborator in Africa. Very few African institutions are successful with their own bids for research grants, and even where this happens, they have often been packaged to satisfy the 'priorities' of a donor agency. A number of researchers submitting proposals to donor agencies remember being told that "while your proposal is well-written and promising, we regret to inform you that we cannot consider it for funding since its subject matter does not fall within our current priorities". Thus, yes, the environment has improved considerably in the last decade, but largely for those researchers and institutions who can tailor their research agenda to suit that of various donor agencies.

Private Sector and Civil Society

I must emphasize the point that there has been a general inability in Africa to develop a relationship between research institutions on the one hand and the private sector and civil society on the other, to exploit the little research output that has been achieved. This is derived from the fact that the research is hardly demand-driven. Thus, the various parties show relatively little interest in research activity.

Independent Non-University Policy Analysis Institutions

In a number of countries, while the establishment of independent think-tanks has been very welcome, particularly as they play crucial roles in raising issues that need to be thought of in policy development, there has been a tendency to view them as substitutes for university-based research institutions. The struggle for financial resources between the two types of institutions from the same donors has not been helpful to the need to work in a complementary manner. The fact also that good researchers from university-based institutions are being drawn away by the better conditions of service into the new breed of policy institutions weakens further the former.

3. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND POTENTIAL

In this section, I illustrate the difficulties of African research institutions with some experiences from Ghana. Research work in Ghana's universities and other research institutions has always been a major weakness of the tertiary education system. While there is some indication of significant research undertakings and outcomes from the past, the situation became much worse since the 1980s. A major reason for the little research activity in the universities has been the limited importance of graduate programs in the institutions. Considering that in most university systems, research work is centered on graduate training, it is unlikely that the situation will change much without radical action.

Inadequate Research Programs

Many research institutions will argue that in the absence of core funding, it is difficult to develop an adequate medium-term research program. They would argue that if they have no funds for the proposals that their staff put together, then there is no incentive for the staff to develop any research proposals in future under an agreed program of activities for the whole institution.

Thus, very few research institutions have reasonable research programs that reflect a good understanding of the local environment and its research needs. In the absence of their own programs, they simply respond to requests from outside institutions. Since many of the requests that come are of a nature that requires little research contribution from the African partners, many are simply engaged as agencies for data collection by their northern collaborators.

The limited research outputs of many institutions consequently do not often suggest any specializations of the institutions.

Financial Constraints

The limited public support for research and lack of a national commitment is exemplified by the relatively small budgetary allocations. At the University of Ghana, until recently, the only funds available for conducting research in teaching departments were allocations made through the Research and Conferences Committee, not exceeding 2 percent of recurrent budgetary allocations to academic departments. The research institutions that have been statutorily set up received no grants to cover research expenses in the 15-year period 1980-95. Thus, budgets made to cover budgeted research expenses were always struck off during budget hearings. Table 1 below shows the relationship between budget estimates made by ISSER, University of Ghana and actual amounts approved by the Ministry of Finance.

Table 1: Summary of ISSER Budgets and Approvals 1991-2001

Year	Total Budget Estimate ¢'million	Total Amount Approved by MOF ¢'million	Approved Budget as Percent of Estimate
1991	97.3	50.3	51.6
1992	120.5	63.8	52.9
1993	210.1	68.4	32.5
1994	217.7	101.6	46.6
1995	321.0	119.7	37.2
1996	593.4	171.3	28.8
1997	850.5	361.4	42.4
1998	982.5	400.8	40.8
1999	1,963.4	434.5	22.1
2000	2,081.9	583.4	28.0
2001	2378.9	1,020.8	42.9

Source: ISSER Accounts Office. University of Ghana, Legon.

Many institutions receive no core funding from governments and other funding agencies. The irony of the situation is that whatever grants that come from the government go largely into the payment of salaries and wages. The trends in the research institutions follow closely those of the universities. The universities and polytechnics in Ghana together receive under 12 percent of the education budget. It is likely that this will go down further as new initiatives in the pre-tertiary sector gain momentum. About 80 percent of the tertiary education budget goes to the 5 universities, leaving 20 percent for the six polytechnics and other tertiary institutions. All institutions spend on average 85 percent of their subventions on salaries.

Human Capacity Problems

The numerous human capacity problems of research institutions can be summed up as follows:

- The staff development efforts of many research institutions and universities have not yielded the desired results as many trained persons have either turned to other institutions in the countries or remained in the countries where they studied.
- One of the debilitating effects of the brain-drain has been that the personnel of research institutions are not always the best the countries have produced.
- Aside from the relatively low threshold level of some staff, many years of nothing much happening in the institutions have left them with little experience in carrying out research in improved conditions. Men and women who returned to their countries with Ph.D from Europe and America in the 1970s and 1980s are today struggling with basic concepts and their application.
- Relatively low salaries (seldom exceeding \$300/month) in many African countries ensure that researchers are very disillusioned, frustrated and poorly-motivated;
- Low salaries make it difficult to recruit young, good researchers, thus ensuring that researchers are relatively old, with no young assistants.
- Frustrated researchers are more likely to turn to consultancy practices that have very little research content, thus taking away potentially useful research time.
- Inactive researchers usually have little exposure to developments elsewhere and are less likely to be aware of new researchable issues, concepts and research methodologies.

The above characterization is not peculiar to any one research institution or any country. It is quite common in many countries. This human capacity problem would explain why a \$1 million loan contracted by the Government of Ghana from the World Bank to support research projects after the submission of suitable relevant proposals, was hardly utilized after two years.

Poor Infrastructure

The poor capital budgets of universities ensure that research institutions cannot develop their infrastructure. The problems may be summarized as follows:

- ◆ Office space is limited, placing another restriction on how many researchers can be in place.
- ◆ Libraries have seen no refurbishment for over two decades and are hardly useable.
- ◆ Computing facilities are very limited and have little capacity for the development of communications, e.g. internet and email facilities.
- ◆ Buildings are in need of repair and improvement.

Limited Opportunities for Graduate Training

A major source of the difficulty in carrying out research in many institutions is the poor development of graduate programs in the universities. The absence of graduate programs reduces the scope of activities that could be meaningfully carried out by the relatively small number of research personnel engaged by the institutions. In universities where some teaching departments run graduate programs, these usually have little to do with the research institutions

4. THE GROWING RESEARCH POTENTIAL: THE ISSER EXPERIENCE

The Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) has had some impact on public policy making in Ghana. Established in 1962, its mandate is to undertake fundamental and applied research in the social sciences; and to establish the basic data needed for effective socio-economic development and modernization. The Institute serves a variety of local and international clientele including the Government of Ghana - Ministries, Departments and

Agencies (MDAs), the Private Sector, NGOs, Bilateral and Multilateral Agencies and the development community at large.

Research at ISSER influences public policy when MDAs and other development partners utilise independent research from ISSER to inform the design and review of policy. For example the annual *State of the Ghanaian Economy Report*, which was initiated to fill the gap in economic data, became an essential reference tool for economic decision making in both the public and private sector. ISSER often collaborates directly with policy makers from the different sectors of the economy to review policy options for Ghana's Development. The outcome of such research often constitutes a direct input into public policy. Studies on the economic impact of malaria and health policy were conducted in collaboration with Ministry of Health. Other examples include the willingness to pay survey for urban environment and sanitation which was done in collaboration with Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. A third dimension of ISSER's influence on public policy embraces advocacy and extension. ISSER packages its research output in the form of policy briefs to busy policy makers but also takes the results of its research to policy makers at policy workshops and seminars. Researchers also share their experience with policy makers in such governance structures as expert committees and commissions and public boards.

ISSER's role in influencing public policy outside Ghana can be observed in its participation in collaborative research and advocacy with Institutions within the West Africa sub-Region, Africa, Asia and Western countries. For instance, between 1992 and 2002, ISSER worked with a network of other researchers and policy makers from Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Togo, and the Netherlands to study food security in the sub-region.

But there are number of fundamental challenges that hinder effective co-operation between researchers and bureaucrats who are the conduit to policy makers. Bureaucrats often express doubts about the usefulness of research undertaken by academics. They may be cynical about quantitative research in particular. This is often attributed to the way such research is packaged. While policy makers often require quick answers, researchers are often preoccupied with seeking more comprehensive explanations for resolving complex political, social, economic and cultural problems. ISSER is currently working on effective ways of bridging the gap between researchers and policy makers. The rest of this section shows what type of research is undertaken at ISSER and the environment within which this is evolving.

An Overview of ISSER Research Activities

The Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) is semi-autonomous within the Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ghana. ISSER is committed to carrying out research and training that is geared towards promoting the socio-economic development of Ghana and other developing countries. The Institute strives to maintain its reputation for solid social science research, paying close attention to exploratory, explanatory and evaluative aspects of the dynamics of development. Special emphasis is placed on the following:

- Ensuring that research has immediate bearing on the development problems and needs of Ghana and the developing world.
- Responding to the direct demands of government and other stakeholders for information and guidance, in selecting priorities and strategies for improving the well-being of Ghanaians and other developing societies.
- Maintaining a focus on the academic purpose of ISSER, and a commitment to add to the existing knowledge about society and development in Ghana and elsewhere.

Following recent restructuring, ISSER's strategic plan indicates that it is working over the period 2004-2010, to be recognized in Ghana and internationally as one of the most authoritative and credible sources of information and knowledge for the preparation of development policy in Ghana, the rest of Africa and other developing regions.

The strategic plan suggests that ISSER is aware of the changing needs of Ghanaian society and the economy, particularly as the nation confronts the urgent need to transform the society and the economy in the face of rapidly growing poverty conditions in several areas. It is obvious that the institutional constraints in this endeavour are immense and pose the greatest

challenge. It is this that informs the strong desire to contribute meaningfully to institution-building in Ghana and also in other places through research, training and advocacy.

ISSER's goal under its strategic plan is to maintain and improve upon its position as the leading producer of quality research in the social and economic policy areas in Ghana. In doing so, the institution pays attention to research into issues with the highest pay-off for the poverty-reduction goals of the nation. These are, to some extent, encapsulated in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS). ISSER research therefore selects from the GPRS those areas that researchers see clear deficiencies in knowledge and understanding, and yet are crucial for the task ahead to guide their work.

In terms of corporate values, the institution

- strives to undertake research that is timely and relevant to the needs of people and has as its underpinnings objectivity, credibility, and reliability.
- upholds the principles of transparency and accountability in dealings with all persons.
- is committed to engaging all stakeholders, governmental or non-governmental, public or private, group or individuals, on an equal footing in all our deliberations without prejudice and selective treatment.
- is committed to serving society from the local communities through to the national and international levels. Researchers compete with one another only by setting higher standards and trying to achieve them.
- strives to be an equal opportunity employer. In the process of engagement and disengagement, ISSER eschews all forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ideology and nationality.
- is strongly committed to the principles of democracy and good governance.
- abhors research that does not support the improvement of the environment.

The current research approach at ISSER is to primarily inform the Ghanaian and international development policy makers and practitioners about the socio-economic status of Ghanaians and the opportunities for improvement, using state of the art policy research tools. There is emphasis on the following characteristics:

Multidisciplinary Research

The general research strategy involves bringing together expertise from different social science backgrounds. ISSER also often brings social and natural scientists together. This is expected to promote holistic analysis of development problems and solutions.

Equity in Development

Based on the commitment to principles of equity ISSER research is guided by analytical frameworks that promote the values of equity and participation.

Poverty Reduction

ISSER is fully committed to conducting research that brings Ghana closer to the goal of reducing poverty significantly as a human rights issue, and the developmental objective of becoming a middle income country.

Capacity-Building

Through collaboration with local and international agencies the ISSER research team is able to provide policy advice and participate in policy analysis and decision-making. As part of this, the ISSER research team is constantly enjoined to learn and exchange ideas with other groups engaged in socio-economic research.

To carry out its mandate, ISSER operates through two main research divisions, namely Economics and Social Development Research. The Economics Division has recently been reorganized to have three units to deal with

- (a) Macroeconomic Policy,

- (b) Household Economics and
- (c) Institutional Economics.

The Social Development Division has also been re-organized to have four units, namely

- (a) Rural Institutions,
- (b) Population and Health,
- (c) Gender, Livelihoods and Technology, and
- (d) Spatial Development and the Environment.

The research divisions are supported by two other divisions in

- (a) Statistics, Computing, Communications and Information, and
- (b) Human Resource Development.

The current areas of focus in the research units are as follows:

Economics Division

- Macroeconomics Unit: Growth, Poverty and Fiscal Policy;
Growth, Poverty, Monetary and Financial Policy;
Growth, Poverty, Trade and Exchange Rate Policy;
Macro-econometric Modelling;
- Household Economics Unit: Micro-econometric Modelling;
Household Production Behaviour
Household Consumption Behaviour and Patterns
- Institutional Economics: Institutional Economics and Development;
Political Economy of Growth and Poverty
Reduction;

Social Division

- Rural Institutions Unit: Poverty, Decentralization and Technology
Development;
Poverty, Community-Based Organizations and
Technology Development;
- Population and Health Unit: Poverty and Women's Health;
Population Growth and Household Health Status;
- Gender and Technology Unit: Gender, Production and Technology Development;
- Spatial Development and Environment Unit: District Development Planning;
Land Use and the Environment
Land Policy Reform.

By the beginning of 2004, ISSER researchers were involved in 18 research/consultancy projects. These include the following:

Strategies and Analysis for Growth and Access (SAGA) Programme

This is a multi-dimensional research programme funded by USAID through Cornell University. Among the programme components is a book project under the theme "Understanding Poverty in Ghana". Other components of the programme include studies on "Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Poverty Research", "Assessments of Poverty Dynamics" and "Land Tenure and Policy Reform".

The Role of Agriculture in Ghana's Economic Development

This is a multi-dimensional project jointly undertaken by ISSER and the Faculty of Agriculture, and sponsored by the FAO. The research basically sought to explain current trends in agriculture using new techniques from social science research.

Gender, Livelihoods and Land Tenure in Ghana

It is a research project on Gender, Equity, Rural Livelihoods and Land Tenure Reforms in Ghana funded by IDRC. In many parts of rural Ghana, long term environmental changes, coupled with economic liberalisation policies of the last two decades have resulted in stresses on traditional sources of livelihoods and widespread economic hardships and poverty. The study examines the impacts of the introduction of new livelihoods on production systems, land tenure and on gender relations in Ghana.

Ghana Decent Work Pilot Programme: Wages, Incomes and Employment for Poverty Alleviation in Ghana

Employment growth in the Ghanaian economy became negative in the 1990s, except in the informal sector. The Structural Adjustment Programmes ignored the implications for employment and labour market until the initiation of PAMSCAD in 1988. There is an apparent failure of nominal wages to keep pace with the rate of inflation as a result of a deliberate policy by government to keep the wage bill down. The overall project objective is to enhance the Trade Union capacity in Ghana to understand and develop long term social and economic policies, particularly as they relate to wages, incomes and employment. This project was funded by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Impact of Capital Flows and Macroeconomic Policy on the Agricultural Sector of Ghana

In this study, the researchers investigate the impact of physical capital and macroeconomic policy on the agricultural sector in Ghana by modelling a production function for total agricultural output and the proportion of agricultural output that is exported or consumed domestically. This was a SISERA-sponsored project.

Right to Development Research Project

In 1986 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Right to Development, which essentially brought into focus a human rights perspective in development. The research project at ISSER is a spin-off from the activities of the Harvard School of Public Health that was commissioned to report on progress being made towards the implementation of the Right to Development protocols.

Regulation and Competition in Ghana

This project is sponsored by DFID, through the Centre for Regulation and Competition, University of Manchester. The project is expected to end in February 2005. In this multi-year project, ISSER determines what important issues under the theme of "Regulation and Competition" are to be researched into in any year. The first year was used to study the institutional framework for regulation and competition in Ghana. In 2003 the project focused on the regulation of small and medium sized enterprises. It hosted an international workshop on regulation and competition in Ghana in March 2004, and continued with its work on regulation and small enterprises.

Rural Household Asset Choice in Ghana

This is a SISERA-sponsored project that used data from GLSS III and GLSS IV to analyze how rural households allocate their asset portfolios. The study shows that the allocations made by rural households in the two periods did not change with changes in income sizes.

Accra Women's Health Project

The study involves the collection of information on both reproductive and general health from household surveys following World Health Survey recommendations. These household interviews include a full history of marriages and pregnancies and detailed information about self-reported general health and selected specific conditions. This project is sponsored by USAID and carried out collaboratively with the Harvard School of Public Health.

Migration, Globalization and Poverty

This is a collaborative project with the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty at University of Sussex (DRC). The aim of DRC is to promote new policy approaches that will help to maximize the potential benefits of migration for poor people, while minimizing its risks and costs. The programme is undertaking research, capacity-building, training and promotion of dialogue to provide the strong evidential and conceptual base needed for new policy approaches on migration.

Street-Involved Children and HIV/AIDS

This is a project funded by Ford Foundation as an intervention programme/action research which studies and provides street children access to health facilities. They work with psychologists and health personnel and have a “street-wise” office for counselling.

An Assessment of ISSER Work

In April 2004, SISERA assisted ISSER to carry out a self-assessment of its activities. This involved the distribution of questionnaires among ISSER staff, peer institutions and also users of products, for the purpose of evaluating the institution in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and financial viability. I present here a summary of the main points from the self-assessment exercise.

Effectiveness

In assessing the extent to which the institute is able to fulfill its goals in terms of research quality, dissemination, networking etc, the following observations were made from the peer/service user questionnaires. First, a significant proportion of respondents (86.3%) were of the view that the institute's publications met their expectations as stakeholders. A related finding was that 63.6% of the respondents believed that the institute provided value for money while 36.4% said they do not know. In terms of the content of the institute's publications, 13.6% felt they were excellent while the majority (68.2%) said they were very good and 18.2% stated that the contents were good. When asked whether the institute placed enough emphasis on the quality of services it provided, the majority (72.7%) of respondents felt positive about this. Another important observation was that the demand for the institute's publications has increased in recent times; about 60% of respondents stated that they had used the institute's publications over the past three years.

The other two indicators of effectiveness used, namely, publications in refereed journals and number of books published by reputable publishers indicated an interesting trend. First, total output increased by 7.7% and 35.7% over the periods 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 respectively. However, the increases were largely from consultancy reports and conference papers. The major indicators of effectiveness were publications in books and refereed journals. There was no growth in the number of publications in books between 2001 and 2002 but in 2003 there was an increase of about 67%. The number of journal articles in 2002 was 50% higher than the 2001 levels and in 2003 a lower growth rate (16.7%) was recorded over the 2002 figure. The trend in the number of Technical publications is not encouraging, largely due to the delay in getting responses from reviewers. Thus, although staff output has increased over the years, a greater proportion of this increase is in the form of consultancy reports and conference papers and to a lesser extent, books and refereed journals.

Table 2: Output of 11 Senior Members (2001-2003)

	2001	2002	2003
ISSER Technical Publications	0	1	0
Working Papers	3	2	1
Journal Articles	3	6	7
Books or Chapters in Books	3	3	5
Conference Papers	5	8	13
Others (Consultancy Reports etc)	12	8	12
Total	26	28	38

Source: ISSER Self-Assessment Survey

While it is clear that ISSER publications are widely read by various stakeholders, including policy makers, there is no indication that these are necessarily built into the policy making process.

Efficiency

About 57% of respondents in the self assessment exercise were of the view that ISSER responds quickly to their requests while 9.5% of respondents felt otherwise. Service access and usage did not appear very strongly in the responses; a significant number of respondents were of the view that the institute has not marketed itself enough to communities or people outside of the university. They stressed the need for more advocacy work on national issues and also for the institute to hold public forums to disseminate its research findings. It was also suggested that the institute should prepare more policy briefs on economic and social issues to inform the public. In this regard, academic research will become useful to governments, policymakers and the public at large.

Relevance

The institute's relevance among its peers and stakeholders was evaluated in terms of how the institution satisfied stakeholders, how its reputation has improved among its peers, changes in the institute's innovativeness and adaptability to changing conditions and how it enhances professional development. In ascertaining the institute's reputation among its peers/service users the survey revealed that ISSER's mandate is not clear to most of the respondents; as many as 52.4% of respondents suggested that the institute's mandate was not clear to them. In spite of this situation the majority of respondents were generally optimistic about ISSER's future growth and development and that its activities would remain relevant to development policy making.

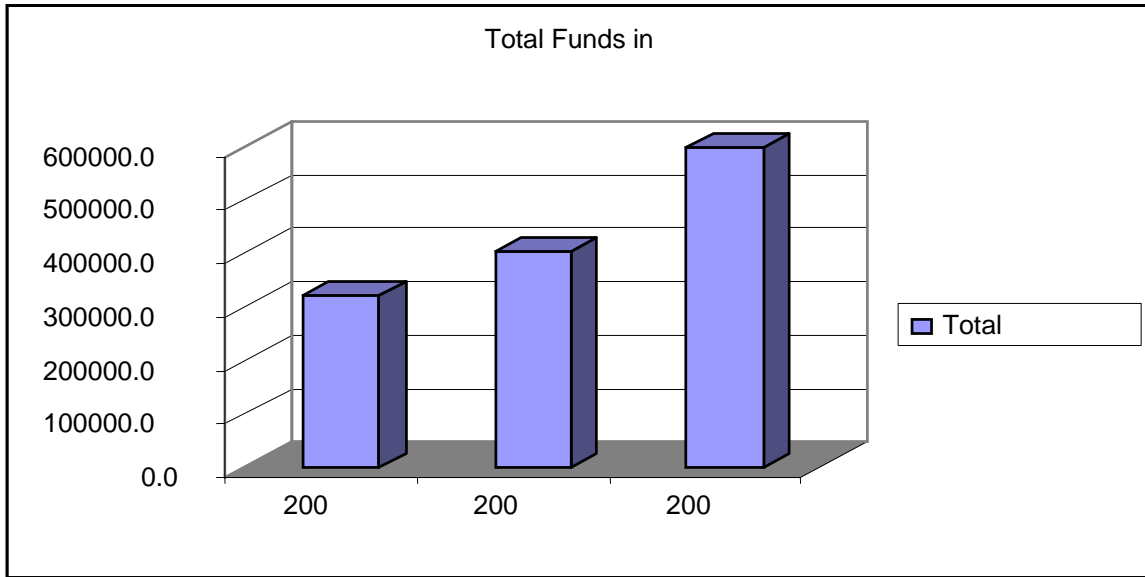
ISSER's peers and service users were also of the view that ISSER can adapt appropriately to changing conditions when the need arises. As many as 61.9% of respondents were positive about the institute's adaptability while 38.1% said they do not know. A related issue is how innovative the institute is in providing services. A significant proportion of respondents (77.2%) were positive about the institute. Finally, the institute's peers/ service users were asked to compare the institute with other research organizations or think-tanks and 45.5% responded ranked the institute excellent while 50% ranked it very good.

Financial Viability

The institute's financial viability was captured in terms of the ratio of revenue from its largest funder to total revenue, its current assets over current liabilities, growth in funds mobilized and the level of diversification in funding sources.

The ratio of revenue from the institutes' largest funder to its total funds (excluding government grants) was 24.4%; meaning the institute was not over-dependent on that source. There has been a consistent growth in funds from 2001 to 2003. Total funds (in US\$ and excluding GOG grants) increased by 48.7% and 55.1% between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 respectively (Figure 1). Although total funds increased consistently over the past three years, the number of funders increased from 10 in 2001 to 18 in 2002 but declined to 15 in 2003 (Figure 2).

Figure 1



The ratio of current assets to current liabilities has been consistently above unity from 2001 to 2003, meaning the institute's liabilities are well covered by its assets (Figure 3). From the above measures it can be concluded that the institute is financially viable. It may be noted that in 2004, total inflows from projects reached the \$1 million mark for the first time. It is projected that ISSER will receive \$2 million in grants in 2005 in line with its strategic plan.

Figure 2

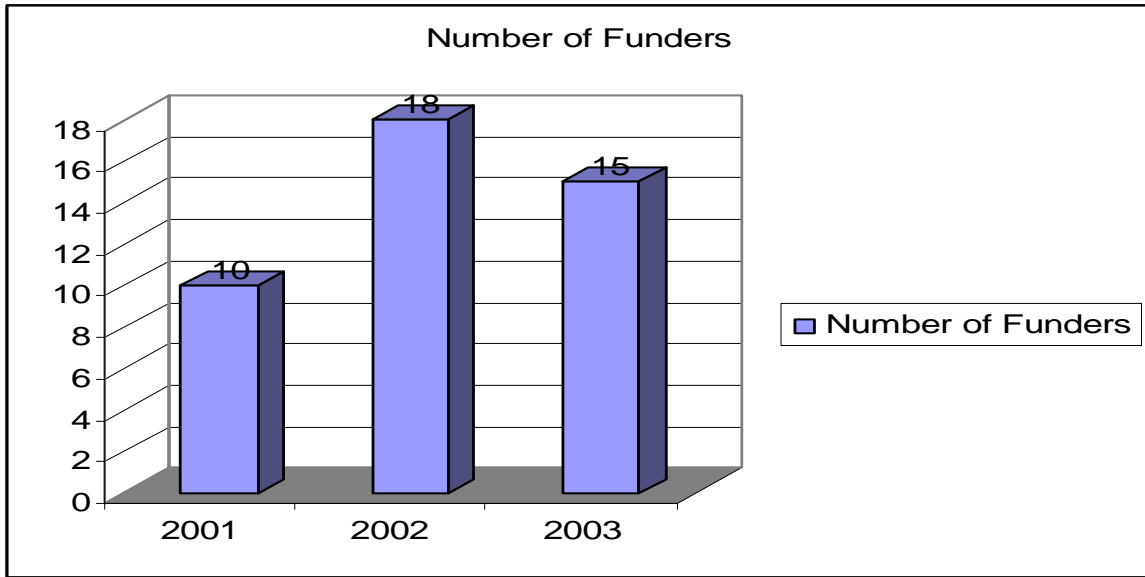
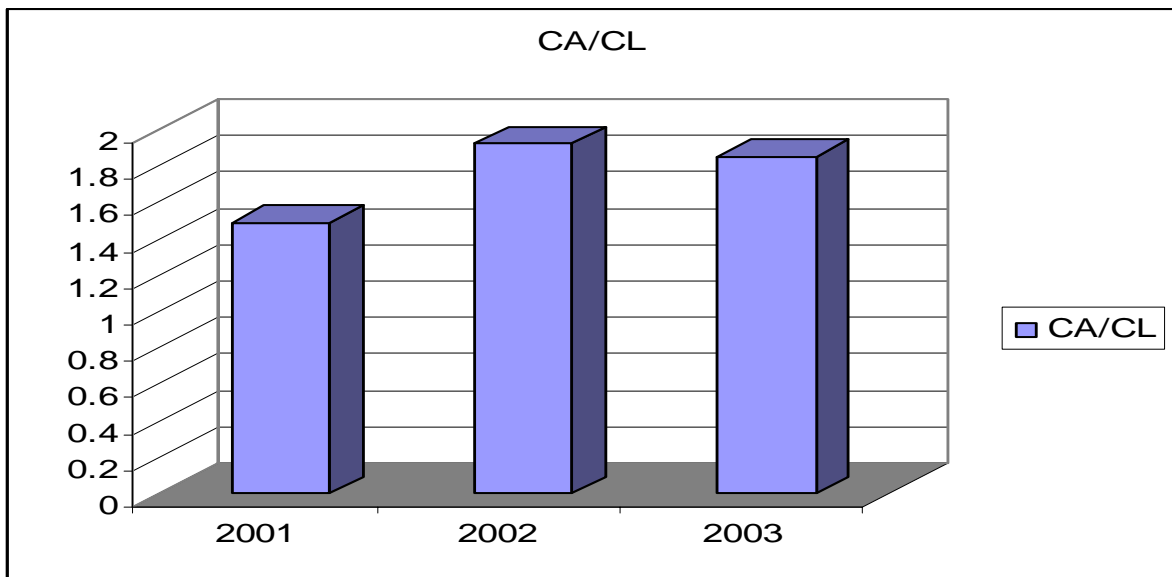


Figure 3



5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the long list of problems facing research institutions in Africa, there is every indication that a rich potential exists for fruitful research work to be undertaken in existing institutions. The kind of support that institutions such as SISERA, AERC, CODESRIA and others have given to individuals and a few institutions has helped to highlight the potential that exists. There are in all research institutions throughout Africa one or two 'bright spots' that offer considerable hope for the future. Most of these have continued to function effectively despite the hardships, in view of the positive effects of proper networking with other international research organizations and support mechanisms. They are able to contribute to domestic as well as international policy debates and are helping to fashion the international research agenda. Some of such collaboration has resulted in a rich set of international research publications coming out.

The next step in the campaign to improve African policy institutions will have to consider moving the networking another step, beyond individuals to collaborating institutions, in order to build in a uniform manner the capacities of the institutions. Link programmes among institutions have helped to achieve some of this in the past and have tremendous potential, if well-designed. The recent experiences of ISSER help to illustrate these potentials. What the ISSER experience shows is that by taking advantage of the several networks that have evolved in the last decade it is possible for institutions to overcome some obstacles, but a lot will depend on the enthusiasm with which various stakeholders will seek to embrace each other.

Reference:

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