



**Social research in the new normal:  
Trends, challenges and prospects for  
Gender, humanitarian and development practice**

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**Abstract**

*This Paper explores emerging trends, challenges and prospects for gender, development and humanitarian efforts in the context of social research. Using secondary data, this Paper adopted the definition of the 'New Normal' as a concept or a state in which an economy or society settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. The Paper discusses the concept of social research in the new normal from the viewpoint of complex humanitarian emergencies especially in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic and global insecurity and their impact on gender, humanitarian and development practice. Leveraging existing literature and experiences from the field, this Paper recommends that social research within the context of the 'new normal', can be adopted and used as a veritable tool to expand the field of knowledge, policy and programming across sectors especially as regards gender, humanitarian and development practice.*



**Keywords:** Gender, New Normal, COVID-19, Complex Emergencies, Development, Humanitarianism



**Introduction**

Social research plays a key role in the successful adoption and promotion of social protection as a strategy for addressing complex humanitarian emergencies. Social research can therefore, be adopted as a veritable tool to understand the trends, challenges and prospects for gender, humanitarian and development practice in the new normal.



Social Protection is an important technique to bridge the humanitarian-development divide and respond to complex humanitarian crises. Scaling up social protection systems has been identified as one of the core avenues to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations' (ECHO, 2018: 1).

Through investments in social research, Nigerian Government can identify existing gaps and entry points for strengthening social protection and other interventions needed to improve social systems and enhance lives of citizens during the new normal. Nigeria's journey to recovery from negative effects of complex emergencies requires an alignment of humanitarian assistance with national and sub-national social protections systems as part of the country's overall response strategy. A strong and reliable Data and knowledge management system is also pivotal documenting social protection mechanisms, innovative technologies, key lessons, and success stories.

#### **Paradigms and Theoretical Framework for Social Research**

Social research theories seek to provide logical explanation to social phenomena, and function in three ways: they prevent chances of being taken in by coincidences; make sense of observed patterns in a way that can suggest other possibilities; and shape and direct research efforts, pointing toward likely discoveries through empirical observation. Elements of social theory include observations, facts, and laws (which relate to the reality being observed), as well as concepts, variables, axioms (Babbie, 2015).

According to Babbie (2020), social scientific inquiry is an interplay of theory and research, logic and observation, induction and deduction and of the fundamental frames of reference known as paradigms. Theories and Paradigms intertwine in the search for meaning in social life. However, while Theories direct researchers' flashlights where they will most likely observe interesting patterns of social life, Paradigms underline social theories and inquiry. Theories seek to explain while paradigms provide ways of looking; they provide logical frameworks within which theories are created. Paradigm is a model or framework for observation and understanding that shapes both what people see and how they understand it. For instance, the conflict paradigms enable people to see social behavior one way while interactional paradigms causes people to see it differently.

Social scientists developed a variety of paradigms for understanding social behavior; these include Macrotheory and Microtheory, Early

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Positivism, Social Darwinism, Conflict Paradigm, Symbolic Interactionism, Ethnomethodology, Structural Functionalism, Feminist Paradigms, Critical Race Theory, and Rational Objectivity Reconsidered. Each of these social science paradigms represents a range of views, each of which offers insights the others lack while ignoring aspects of social life that the others reveal.

Macrotheory deals with large (bigger picture), aggregate entities of society or even whole societies and covers topics such as the struggle among economic classes in a society, international relations, and the interrelations among major institutions in society such as the government, religions and family. Microtheory deals with issues of social life at the level of individuals and small groups such as dating behavior, student-faculty interactions.

Auguste Comte's Early Positivism theory formed the foundation for subsequent development of the social sciences; he used the term 'positivism' to describe his optimism for the future and based on his belief that scientific truths could be positively verified through empirical observations and the logical analysis of what is observed.

Charles Darwin's Social Theory known as Social Darwinism states that as a specie copes with its environment, those individuals most suited to succeed would be the most likely to survive long enough to reproduce while those less well suited will perish, that is, species evolved into different forms through the 'survival of the fittest.'

Karl Marx's Conflict Paradigm focused primarily on the struggle among economic classes; he examined the way capitalism produced the oppression of workers by the owners of industry and sought to end such oppression.

Influenced by Georg Simmel's interactional theory, George Herbert Mead focused his theory of Symbolic Interactionism on the role of communications in human affairs. Mead believed that most interactions revolved around the process of individuals reaching common understanding through the use of language and other such systems called 'Symbolic Interactionism.' Symbolic Interactionism is a paradigm that views human behavior as the creation of meaning through social interactions, with those meanings conditioning subsequent interactions. According to Babbie (2020), this Paradigm can lend insights into the nature of interactions in ordinary social life, but it can also help us understand unusual forms of interaction.

Harold Garfinkel, a contemporary sociologist claims that people are continually creating social structure through their actions and interactions—that they are, in fact, creating their realities. Given the



tentativeness of reality in this view, Garfinkel suggests that people are continuously trying to make sense of the life they experience, that is, everyone is acting like a social scientist, hence the term ethnomethodology, or 'methodology of the people.'

Structural Functionalism is a paradigm that divides social phenomena into parts, each of which serves a function for the operation of the whole. Also known as social systems theory, Structural Functionalism grew out of a notion introduced by Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer: a social entity, such as an organization or a whole society, can be viewed as an organism. Like other organisms, a social system is made up of parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole.

Feminist Paradigms view and understand society through the experiences of women and/or examine the generally deprived status of women in society. The Paradigm not only reveal the treatment of women or the experience of oppression but often point to limitations in how other aspects of social life are examined and understood. Feminist paradigms challenge the prevailing notions concerning consensus in society.

Critical Race Theory is a paradigm that is grounded in race awareness and an intention to achieve racial justice. The roots of the Critical Race Theory are generally associated with the civil rights movement of the mid 1950s and race-related legislation of the 1960s.

Rational Objectivity Reconsidered: Some contemporary theorists and researchers have challenged the long-standing belief in an objective reality that abides by rational rules. They point out that it is possible to agree on an "intersubjective" reality, a view that characterizes postmodernism (Babbie, 2015).

### **Social Research Explained**

Social Research is a method used by social scientists and researchers to learn about people and societies so that they can design products/services that cater to various needs of the people. Social research is a research conducted by social scientists following a systematic plan. Social research methodologies can be classified as quantitative and qualitative (Shackman, 2009).

Social research denotes academic research on topics relating to questions relevant to the social scientific fields, such as sociology, human geography, social policy, politics, and criminology. Thus, social research involves research that draws on the social sciences for conceptual and theoretical inspiration; such research may be



motivated by developments and changes in society but also employs social scientific ideas to shed light on those changes (Bryman, 2016).

### **Objective of Social Research**

Social Research has the objective of identifying the cause-and-effect relationship between social problems so that these problems can be solved to enhance societal welfare (Voxco, 2021).

### **Purpose and Benefits of Social Research**

Social theory attempts to discuss and explain what is, not what should be. Social science looks for regularities in social life. Three major purposes of social research are exploration, description, and explanation (Babbie, 2020). Social research can be a vehicle for mapping out a topic that may warrant further study later: looking into a new political or religious group, learning something about use of a new street drug, and so forth. The methods vary greatly and the conclusions are usually suggestive rather than definitive. Even so, such exploratory social research, if carefully done, can dispel some misconceptions and help focus future research.

Also, social research can be done for the purpose of describing the state of social affairs: What is the unemployment rate? What is the racial composition of a particular city? What percentage of the population plans to vote for a particular political candidate? Careful empirical description takes the place of speculation and impressions. In most cases, social research can have an explanatory purpose - providing reasons for phenomena in the form of causal relationships. Why do some cities have higher unemployment rates than others? Why are some people more prejudiced than others? Why are women likely to earn less than men for doing the same job? Although answers to such questions abound in ordinary, everyday discourse, some of those answers are simply wrong. Explanatory social research provides more trustworthy explanations. While some studies focus mainly on one of these three purposes, it is often the case that a given study will have elements of all three (Babbie, 2015).

Social research helps to acquire knowledge of human society; helps to analyze social behavior, understand the causes, and accelerate its evolution; expands knowledge to drive discovery and innovation; and contributes to the growth and development of a nation or the entire human society (Voxco, 2021).



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## **Types of Social Research**

There are four main types of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Research, Primary and Secondary Research.

- i. **Qualitative Research:** is a method to collect data via open-ended and conversational discussions. There are five main qualitative research methods - ethnographic research, focus groups, one-on-one online interview, content analysis and case study research.
- ii. **Quantitative Research:** is an extremely informative source of data collection conducted via mediums such as surveys, polls, and questionnaires. The gathered data can be analyzed to conclude numerical or statistical results.
- iii. **Primary Research:** is conducted by the researchers themselves. Examples include surveys, polls or questionnaires.
- iv. **Secondary Research:** is a method where information has already been collected by research organizations or marketers. Examples include: Newspapers, online communities, reports, audio-visual evidence, among others (QuestionPro, 2022).

There are four distinct quantitative research methods: survey research, correlational research, causal-comparative research and experimental research.

### **Social Research Designs**

Quantitative designs approach social phenomena through quantifiable evidence, and often rely on statistical analysis of many cases (or across intentionally designed treatments in an experiment) to create valid and reliable general claims. It is related to quantity.

Qualitative designs emphasize understanding of social phenomena through direct observation, communication with participants, or analysis of texts, and may stress contextual subjective accuracy over generality. This is related to quality.

### **Methods of Social Research**

**Table 1** below highlights the various methods of Social Research compiled from various sources.

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Questionnaires</li> <li>•Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Yields many responses</li> <li>•Can survey a large sample</li> <li>•Data generalizable</li> <li>•Quantitative data are easy to chart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Can be time consuming</li> <li>•Can be difficult to encourage participant response (low response rates)</li> <li>•Captures what people say they think and believe but not necessarily how they behave in real life</li> </ul>
Fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Observation</li> <li>•Participant observation</li> <li>•Ethnography</li> <li>•Case study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Yields detailed, accurate real-life information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Time consuming</li> <li>•Data are often descriptive and not conducive to generalization</li> <li>•Researcher "bias" is difficult to control for</li> <li>•Qualitative data are difficult to organize</li> </ul>
Experiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Deliberate manipulation of social setting to compare experimental and control groups. Tests cause and effect relationships</li> <li>•Hawthorne effect</li> <li>•Artificial conditions of research</li> <li>•Ethical concerns about people's well-being</li> </ul>		
Secondary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics)</li> <li>•Research of historic documents</li> <li>•Content analysis</li> <li>•Makes good use of previous sociological information</li> <li>•Data could be focused on a purpose other than yours</li> <li>•Data can be hard to find</li> <li>•Taking into account the historical or cultural context of texts</li> </ul>		

### Ethical and Political Considerations in Social Research

Social research takes place in a social context; thus, Babbie (2015) recommended that researchers must therefore take into account the following ethical and political considerations alongside scientific ones in designing and executing their research: Voluntary Participation, No Harm to the Participants, Anonymity and Confidentiality, Deception, Analysis and Reporting, Institutional Review Boards, and Professional Codes of Ethics.

The norm of voluntary participation is important though it is often difficult for researchers to follow. Babbie (2015) argued that in cases where researchers feel ultimately justified in violating the Voluntary participation principles, their observing the other ethical norms of scientific research, such as bringing no harm to the people under study, becomes very important. The ethical norms of 'voluntary participation' and 'no harm to participants' were formalized in the concept of 'informed consent' which emphasizes that subjects must base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risks involved. They are required to sign a statement indicating that they are aware of the risks and that they choose to participate anyway. Coercion is not to be used to force



participation, and subjects may terminate their involvement in the research at any time.

A research project guarantees 'Anonymity' when the researcher - not only the people who read about the research - cannot identify a given response with a given respondent. This implies that a typical interview-survey respondent can never be considered anonymous, because an interviewer collects the information from an identifiable respondent. An example of anonymity is a mail survey in which no identification numbers are put on the questionnaires before their return to the research office. A research project guarantees 'Confidentiality' when the researcher can identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly.

Debriefing was introduced as a method to address the ethical issue of deception on the part of a researcher; debriefing entails interviews to discover any problems generated by the research experience so that those problems can be corrected.

In addition to their ethical obligations to subjects, researchers have ethical obligations to their colleagues in the scientific community. These obligations concern the analysis of data and the way the results are reported. In any rigorous study, the researcher should be more familiar than anyone else with the study's technical limitations and failures. Researchers have an obligation to make such shortcomings known to their readers - even if admitting qualifications and mistakes makes them feel foolish. Negative findings, for example, should be reported if they are at all related to the analysis. In general, science progresses through honesty and openness; ego defenses and deception retard it. Thus, researchers must avoid the temptation to save face by describing their findings as the product of a carefully preplanned analytic strategy when that is not the case. Most of the professional associations of social researchers have created and published formal codes of conduct describing what is considered acceptable and unacceptable professional behavior (Ibid). Social scientists must therefore find out applicable codes of conduct in social research and adhere to them.

### **Contemporary Trends in Social Research**

In recent times, there has been an evolution of a variety of trends in social research; some of these trends are: Economic shift towards the emerging markets and technology in Asia, Latin America, Middle East, & Africa; Qualitative research vs. quantitative research: The shift to massive analytics/digitization; Increasing recognition/value attached to research for knowledge advancement and robust policy-making (for instance, the Nigerian Institute of Social And Economic Research -



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NISER); Shift from basic research to applied/empirical research; Increasing involvement in research management, no longer just research production; Mixed-method research getting common – qualitative + quantitative / primary data + secondary data; Phenomena of 'big data'; Policy-relevant research as opposed to 'abstract' research/'academic' versus 'practice-based' research; Increased interdisciplinary research; and Research professionalization (Involvement of Private sector, research-consultants) in data collection and compilation, not just data analysis (Stephen, 2015).

### **Contextualizing the 'New Normal'**

A 'new normal' is a state to which an economy or society settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. The term was employed in relation to World War I, September 11 attacks, financial crisis of 2007–2008, the aftermath of the 2008–2012 global recessions, the COVID-19 pandemic and other events (*World Economic Forum*, 2020). The term 'new normal' first appeared during the 2008 financial crisis to refer to the dramatic economic, cultural and social transformations that caused precariousness and social unrest, impacting collective perceptions and individual lifestyles (El-Erian, 2010).

In contemporary era, 2020 is a historical year in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it ushered the global community into the 'new normal' as an aftermath of COVID-19 Pandemic and in the face of current global crises. For many people, 2020 has already been earmarked as 'the worst' year in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (UNESCO, 2021).

Complex humanitarian emergencies (CHEs) including the current COVID-19 Pandemic, armed conflicts and natural disasters have brought the global community into the 'new normal' thereby requiring innovative research to understand their trends, impacts and key lessons that can influence policy and developmental actions. It is believed that social and behavioural sciences can provide great insights for managing the CHEs and their effects.

According to Corpuz (2021), the term 'new normal' was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to point out how it has transformed essential aspects of human life; thus, with the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, we have suddenly been forced to adapt to the 'new normal': work-from-home setting, parents home-schooling their children in a new blended learning setting, lockdown and quarantine, and the mandatory wearing of face mask and face shields in public. He argued that so far as the world has not found a safe and effective vaccine, 'we may have to adjust to a new normal as people get back to work, school and a more normal life. As such, we have



reached the end of the beginning. We are starting to see a way to restore health, economies and societies together despite the new coronavirus strain. In the face of global crisis, we need to improvise, adapt and overcome. The new normal is still emerging, so I think that our immediate focus should be to tackle the complex problems that have emerged from the pandemic by highlighting resilience, recovery and restructuring (the new three Rs). When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, the best of our new normal will survive to enrich our lives and our work in the future.'

For Biddlestone et al (2020), new conventions, rituals, images and narratives will no doubt emerge, so there will be more work for cultural sociology before we get to the beginning of the end.' Effects of the Pandemic have been felt in the personal, social, economic and spiritual spheres. For instance, CORDERO (2021) observed the involvement of a 'supportive' government, 'creative' church and an 'adaptive' public in the so-called culture.

### **Role, Priorities and Opportunities for Social Research in the New Normal**

Social Science researchers have a key role to play in the new normal and need to leverage the available research opportunities created by the COVID-19 Pandemic, armed conflicts and natural disasters which are currently ravaging the world's economy. According to Wright & Harvey (2020), in order to maximize the impact of social science research, there is need to reconsider how social scientists can present their research to, and engage with, the public sphere, which involves recognizing the benefits of using social media to represent expertise. Social researchers must adapt their methods to the new obstacles posed by the pandemic so as to continuously contribute valuable insights into the pandemic and responses to it (Gardner, 2020). To achieve this, (Bouchon, 2020) recommended interdisciplinary collaborations; this will in turn enable researchers to account for the gaps between assumptions made in epidemiological models and social realities, to reveal the unintended consequences of interventions and to nuance mathematical modeling to improve its parameters (Teti et al, 2020). Macgregor et al (2020) emphasized the importance of using a wide range of evidence when negotiating life and research post-pandemic, such as both expert and experiential knowledge.

Regarding opportunities, COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant pause in many people's work routines provided a quieter moment for researchers and academics to reflect upon some critical issues that are often glossed over in the commotion of everyday life; for instance, will current circumstances cause us to reflect upon and recognize the



complex domestic social structures that sustain academic research? Will we increase serious engagement with online forms of research communication? The decisions we make now may shape the future of social science (Wright & Harvey, 2020). Whereas Derrick (2020) believe that the goodwill and flexibility that has been extended during the pandemic should be carried forward and the momentum used to embed kindness into research practice, Corbera et al (2020) affirm that this suggested change in attitude within research extends to prioritizing tasks which will have an impact, taking seriously knowledge transfer to civil society, engaging in policy change activities and writing less but better. Projects can be redesigned to be more socially meaningful and environmentally sustainable, and to reduce stress on the research team and participants.

de Waal (2020) highlighted the following key priorities for social research in the wake of COVID-19: observing the emergent agency of those coping with Covid-19; paying more attention to fragile and conflict-affected contexts; and beginning to synthesize the large volume of research that is set to be produced; and a good place to start for research would be to identify countries where strong research networks are in place. On their part, the World Health Organization (2020a) identified some preliminary priority thematic areas for social science contributions to supporting the Covid-19 response: public health; clinical care and health systems; engagement in public health response and clinical research media and communications; sexual and reproductive health; and international cooperation. Importantly, all research agendas and questions will need to be closely contextualized at regional, national and local levels.

Corbera et al (2020) believed that the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to prompt more tangible communication between the policy making and academic communities in the face of other crises such as pollution, biodiversity loss, global climate change, the sanitation crisis, and rising social and economic inequalities. To guide social scientists seeking to use their research to support the Covid-19 response in Sub-Saharan Africa, CASS (2020) produced a Brief which provides a summary of suggested research questions and a rationale for how they would inform the response.

### **Social Research in the New Normal – Trends and Challenges**

The impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on social science research is extensive: beyond the widely documented health implications, the pandemic has created a human and economic crisis on an unprecedented scale (Oldekop et al, 2020); the deepening social inequalities across the Globe currently recognized as endemic to the current neoliberal economic order are likely to intensify the suffering



that the pandemic causes while inequalities in access to services and benefits are highly emphasized by the pandemic, especially in countries without access to universal healthcare (Macgregor et al, 2020); the lockdown measures implemented internationally in domino effect are translating into high unemployment rates, greater poverty and social inequality (Corbera et al, 2020); the pandemic has also been highly gendered in its impacts (Alon et al, 2020), the most widely documented being the exacerbation of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including the increased risk of violence within the home and sexual exploitation in exchange for health care services or social safety-net benefits (UN Women, 2020); Pandemic responses will face the challenges of fragmented authority, low state capacity, high levels of civilian displacement, low citizen trust in leadership and political violence (Brown & Blanc, 2020); Conflict itself leads to abject poverty, and Covid-19 has delivered a heavy blow to the world's economies, meaning that conflict-affected populations who already have few social safety-nets are likely to be severely affected (Stern, 2020); the resultant economic hardships will exacerbate tensions and act as a driver of further conflict (Gujit, 2020); while income will determine how and whether people withstand the pandemic in a conflict, highlighting the existing levels of inequality (de Harder, 2020b). Therefore, social scientists planning to conduct research requiring participation, especially with marginalized or vulnerable populations, or those in conflict-affected countries, should consider these new, tumultuous conditions at all stages of research, including when deciding what to research (Barei-Guyot, 2021).

Covid-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions to research institutions of all kinds. Common impacts include the postponement and cancellation of conferences and workshops (Bania & Dubey, 2020); increased caring responsibilities limiting researchers' ability to continue working as normal; an inability to conduct face-to-face research because of the risk of virus transmission; an inability to conduct overseas fieldwork as a result of travel restrictions; and disruptions caused by higher education institutions moving to online learning (Barei-Guyot, 2021). Many research councils allocated resources as their contribution to the Covid-19 pandemic response measures; however, discussion platforms on the future of research for development revealed that damage to the economies of the UK and other high-income countries may negatively affect the availability of funding for research partnerships in lower-income countries (Brooks, 2020).

According to Richardson (2020), the study of a sample of published articles showed a trend towards smaller partnerships, which presents the danger that researchers from developing countries will be excluded from collaborations and the sharing of papers and data.



Less participation in the field by developing countries has also been recorded, as well as a decrease of 4% in the production of articles from researchers in such countries since Covid-19 emerged.

### **Emerging Tools for Social Research in the New Normal**

Qualitative studies rely on face-to-face interaction through interviews, fieldwork and focus group discussions for data collection, and, thus, the transmissibility of COVID-19 and the responses by countries to combat it using lockdowns and physical distancing have impacted traditional qualitative data collection methods (Ndhlovu, 2020).

Globally, there has been an influx of various adaptive innovative tools for undertaking social research especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures which made face-to-face interactive aspects of qualitative research difficult. These tools include ICT-related tools such as voice and video calling, and prompt messaging (text-based options) which are widely used to effectively replicate the face-to-face interview or focus group discussions. Despite the common problems such as difficulty in using the technology by some participants and poor-quality internet connection, video-calling was found to be the closest substitute to face-to-face interviews. It enabled the researcher to collect data across different locations in the face of national lockdown.

Web-based platforms such as Zoom became an effective tool for interacting with small-, medium-, and large-sized teams. Whatsapp Application which is accessible on both mobile phones and desktop computers are used to collect qualitative data; it enables users to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, videos, documents, and user locations. Secondary content analysis of newspaper, magazine articles, journals, textbooks, and blogs, were used by researchers to study a wide range of issues under COVID-19 restrictions. Also, television, radio and online discussions forums and social media platforms, including social networking (Facebook, WhatsApp), microblogging (Twitter), photo sharing (Snapchat, Instagram), and video sharing (Facebook Live, You Tube) are used in the same manner (with due attention to relevant privacy and data protection restrictions) to study a wide range of social phenomena across time and space and overcome the constraints of lockdowns (Ndhlovu, 2020).

More researchers engaged in online surveys in assembling their qualitative data; they create online questionnaires with open-ended questions and email them or send the link to prospective participants, requesting that they type their responses in the provided spaces



(Jowett, 2020). This is indeed an innovative and cost-effective strategy which is useful even beyond COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Influence of Social Research on other Research Outcomes**

Social researchers have two distinct motivations: understanding and application; they are fascinated by the nature of human social life and are driven to explain it. Social Research has huge benefits and has been used as a tool to influence research outcomes in other sectors. For instance, a sociologist – Ross Koppler (2005) and his colleagues in the article 'Role of Computerized Physician Order Entry Systems in Facilitating Medication Errors', used several social research techniques to test the effectiveness of the Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) system developed by medical researchers as a solution to the huge problems experienced in the traditional system of handwritten prescriptions especially as regards medication errors in hospitals which as at 2005 was estimated to lead to about 770,000 deaths or injuries annually. Through their social research, Koppler and his colleagues concluded that the CPOE system was not nearly as effective as claimed; it did not prevent errors in medication. This groundbreaking scholarly work has been cited over 20,000 times in other articles and led to Koppler's fame (Schuyler, 2006).

### **Social Research – Prospects for Gender, Humanitarian and Development Practice**

With continued population growth, urbanization, stretched natural resources, protracted conflict and the impact of climate change becoming more apparent, the number of humanitarian crises continues to grow, as does the number of communities requiring humanitarian assistance. Thus, social research within the context of the 'new normal' can be adopted as a veritable tool to expand the field of knowledge, policy and programming across sectors especially as regards gender, humanitarian and development practice.

Gender disaggregated data can also be an integral part of social research aimed to influence budgeting, policy, planning, administration and programming especially within the contexts of humanitarian and development practice within and beyond complex humanitarian emergencies including armed conflict, natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics (COVID-19).

ECHO (2018:2) identified three fundamental approaches to connecting social protection and humanitarian assistance in order to bridge the humanitarian-development divide. First, using existing social protection programmes to prevent or manage disasters, social protection can be used to build capacity at individual, household,



community and national levels to withstand the negative impact of shocks, and can be scaled up to respond in times of crises. Second, using humanitarian response to build social protection systems particularly in situations of extreme fragility, where social protections are absent or very weak 'humanitarian interventions can be used as a window of opportunity to trigger investments in the development of "nascent" safety nets or social assistance structures'. Third, in situations of forced displacement, social protection can become a cornerstone of strategies to address protracted displacement, including that of IDPs and refugees. This will entail alignment of humanitarian responses with national social protection systems (SPIACB, n.d.: 2).

UNDG (2018: 4) working paper identified the following benefits of aligning humanitarian assistance and national systems: For Governments, huge gains can be achieved from utilizing common platforms and tools that have been tested and proven to contribute to improved transparency, efficiency and accountability; Governments can benefit from embedding humanitarian mechanisms to enhance the shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems and to enable these to respond to future disasters; Performance improvements resulting from enhanced capacity could incentivize donors to provide financial support needed to overcome funding constraints. Working through common systems could improve the predictability of financing and the sustainability of their programmes, while ensuring that refugee needs are addressed through sustainable systems that rely less on short-term humanitarian funding. Lastly, for donors, alignment between the two systems based on the use of common systems and tools, would provide the incentive for a more coherent, cost-effective and sustainable financing architecture.

The UNDG paper (2018b: 3) stresses that, 'Leveraging and investing resources in monitoring and evaluation, as well as in high quality research by all stakeholders, is required to generate a systematic evidence base that will then pave the way for improved effectiveness in social protection policy-making and programming whilst making the 'business' case to enable governments to expand social protection coverage.'

Enhanced linkages between humanitarian and development funding streams would also enable the needed longer-term investments for strengthening, building or rebuilding integrated national social protection systems. Also, there is need for more robust evidence-building and learning from social protection/assistance interventions, also to secure effective and differentiated approaches that account for contextual specificities at country level. In particular on: the relationship between displacement, vulnerability and poverty to



inform the articulation of more harmonized targeting methodologies; the differential impact, including gender impact of various social protection measures and delivery models and in various contexts; the economic and social security benefits of participation of displaced populations in the labour markets; conditions under which the delivery of basic services and social protection contribute towards state legitimacy and social cohesion (Idris, 2019).

### **Innovative Social Research Tools for addressing Gender, Humanitarian and Development Issues in the New Normal**

UNICEF in its Glossary of Terms defined 'Gender' as a social and cultural construct which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. According to the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), the term 'Gender' refers to the socio-cultural roles, norms, and values associated with being a man or a woman. These roles, norms, and values determine how women and men prepare for, react to, and recover from disasters, and they often cause unequal distribution of power, economic opportunities, and sense of agency.

Development is one of the main priorities of the United Nations; it is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development (United Nations, 1997). Humanitarian-Development Nexus refers to "the transition or overlap between the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the provision of long-term development assistance" (Strand 2020: 104).

Humanitarian Development Studies is a framework that brings together interrelated disciplines ranging from hard sciences to humanities (e.g. engineering, medicine, law, management, economics, political science, geography, anthropology) with the purposes of analyzing the underlying causes of humanitarian crisis and of formulating appropriate strategies for rehabilitation and development (University of Deusto, 1999).

Gender, Humanitarian and Development Practice are becoming topical issues in global discussions as a result of evolving issues and impact arising from their application in the society. Literature exists on each of the three concepts; however, there are very few literatures on their interconnectedness. As such, social science researchers have a unique opportunity to explore the trends, best practices and key lessons that are relevant in the current era. Consequently, this Paper reviewed extant literature on emerging trends and best practice





innovations that can be leveraged by social researchers in Nigeria in addressing contemporary issues in gender, humanitarian and development practice in this post-covid-19 era.

Some of the tools are proposed and discussed below.

- i. **General Social Survey:** General Social Survey (GSS) is a sociological survey created and regularly collected since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and funded by the National Science Foundation. Since 1972, the GSS has been monitoring societal change and studying the growing complexity of American society. It is one of the most influential studies in the social sciences, and is frequently referenced in leading publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the Associated Press (NORC, 2020). The GSS gathers data on contemporary American society to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviors, and attributes; to examine the structure and functioning of society in general as well as the role played by relevant subgroups; to compare the United States to other societies to place American society in comparative perspective and develop cross-national models of human society; and to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policy makers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting.

The data collected about the GSS includes both demographic information and respondents' opinions on matters ranging from government spending to the state of race relations to the existence and nature of God. Because of the wide range of topics covered, and the comprehensive gathering of demographic information, survey results allow social scientists to correlate demographic factors like age, race, gender, and urban/rural upbringing with beliefs, and thereby determine whether, for example, an average middle-aged black male respondent would be more or less likely to move to a different U.S. state for economic reasons than a similarly situated white female respondent; or whether a highly educated person with a rural upbringing is more likely to believe in a transcendent God than a person with an urban upbringing and only a high-school education. GSS results are freely made available to interested parties over the internet, and are widely used in sociological research. The data are generally available in formats designed for statistical programs (e.g., R/SAS/SPSS/Stata), and the GSS Data Explorer allows users to search GSS information, test hypotheses, and

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look for interesting correlations directly on the website (Wikipedia, 2022).

In 1984 the GSS was a cofounder of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), collaboration between different nations conducting surveys covering topics for social science research. The first ISSP questions were asked as part of the GSS. Since 1985 the ISSP has conducted an annual cross-national survey and the GSS has participated in each ISSP round. GSS is NORC's longest-running project and one of its most influential. GSS data are frequently used in newspaper, magazine, and journal articles and by legislators, policymakers, and educators. The GSS also serves as a major teaching tool in colleges and universities. More than 32,500 journal articles, books, and PhD dissertations are based on GSS data, and approximately 400,000 students use the GSS in their classes each year (NORC, 2020). Contemporary scholars in the social sector can adapt the GSS within the Nigerian context and use it to understand the history, experiences, attitudes and practices of Nigerian citizens and residents which can also influence policy, developmental planning and programming.

- ii. **Social Protection Research Tool:** Social protection is a strategic tool for addressing social issues arising from complex humanitarian emergencies. Social research can therefore be employed as a method to identify, document and recommend practical innovations in social assistance interventions including approaches, tools and systems. According to ECHO (2018), Social Protection is a set of policies and actions that enhance the capacity of all people, but notably poor and vulnerable groups, to escape from poverty (or avoid falling into poverty), and better manage risks and shocks. In crisis or shock situations, social protection interventions are primarily a means to help meeting immediate needs and reducing mortality and human suffering.

There is a variety of social protection tools in existence including the Social Protection System Review (SPSR) which was recently developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with the aim of informing developing countries' efforts to extend and reform their social protection systems. SPSR takes a holistic view of a country's social protection system, examining its three pillars – social assistance, social insurance and labour market programmes – within the country's broader policy



context. SPSR takes a forward-looking approach, providing a diagnostic of the current state of the social protection system and highlighting future challenges and options for addressing them (OECD, 2022). This includes an analysis of the country's demographics, poverty dynamics, labour market trends and revenue base in so far as these have implications for the social protection system. The analysis also examines how social protection expenditure is currently financed and its sustainability over the long term.

SPSR places a strong emphasis on assessing the extent to which a social protection system provides effective and equitable coverage for the poor and those who are vulnerable to poverty. It analyses whether the system has contributed to reducing poverty, vulnerability and inequality as well as examining the extent to which it has fostered more inclusive growth, defined as an improvement of living standards and the sharing of the benefits of increased prosperity more evenly across social groups. The analysis includes non-monetary dimensions that matter for well-being, such as employment prospects, health outcomes, educational opportunities or vulnerability to adverse environmental factors. SPSRs specifically examine five dimensions of a country's social protection system:

- i. Need: Forward-looking analysis of risks and vulnerabilities across the life-cycle to determine the need for social protection.
- ii. Coverage: Identification of existing social protection schemes and gaps in coverage.
- iii. Effectiveness: Assessment of the adequacy, equity and efficiency of social protection provision.
- iv. Sustainability: Assessment of fiscal policy and the financing of social protection.
- v. Coherence: Assessment of the institutions for social protection and their alignment with other policies.

Introducing the Social Protection System Review (SPSR) in Nigeria will guide social researchers in providing an analysis of the main challenges in the Country's social protection system and identifying entry points for its extension and reform over the long term. Also, through its participatory approach and data generated from the SPSR, Nigerian Government and stakeholders in the humanitarian and development sector will be able to identify and address national priorities and areas for

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capacity strengthening including evidenced-based research, policy making and programming. Where possible, the analysis is conducted jointly with government officials and/ or local researchers to build capacity for evidence-based policy-making.

### **Decolonizing Social Research beyond the New Normal**

Decolonizing is a daily practice involving a lot of self-reflection; we need to recognize that much of what we do reinforces a particular understanding of history that places higher-income countries centre-stage and blurs the inequalities in research relationships between them and middle- and lower-income countries (Bhattacharya et al, 2020).

There are embedded inequalities in the research process, especially relating to funding, pay, authorship and representation (Renton et al, 2020). Leon-Himmelstine & Pinet (2020) recognized the existence of such inequality and stated that researchers from higher-income countries usually lead in the design of research and the writing of articles and reports, regardless of the nature of the partnership. A recent study by SOAS (2020) revealed that a key indicator of the unequal power relations between researchers in higher-, middle- and lower-income countries is the power to define 'risk, vulnerability and harm'. For Renton et al (2020), this is suggestive of colonial ideology, which presented the 'other' as riskier, and highlights the limitations that a narrow 'Northern/Western' lens presents for being able to assess risk and harm within alternative contexts. Thus, to ensure that definitions of 'risk, vulnerability and harm' are locally informed on a continual basis, especially in the midst of a global pandemic, researchers in higher-income countries should willingly relinquish some of the power and control they currently hold in research processes and relationships (Renton et al, 2020).

In discussing the future of social science research, it is pertinent to understand the deep-rooted power dynamics and colonial 'logics' in the research relationships between higher-income countries and middle- and lower-income countries which were made difficult to ignore in light of the changes brought about by the pandemic's international lockdown measures (Renton et al, 2020). In challenging research contexts, there tends to be an unequal racial distribution of roles, and also of vulnerability (Bisoka, 2020); for example, being left fully reliant on researchers in middle and lower-income countries made many researchers in higher-income countries to recognize the problems with 'normal' research conduct, primarily the ways in which research partners and participants in the former are silenced by what can be considered colonial practices (Leon-Himmelstine & Pinet,



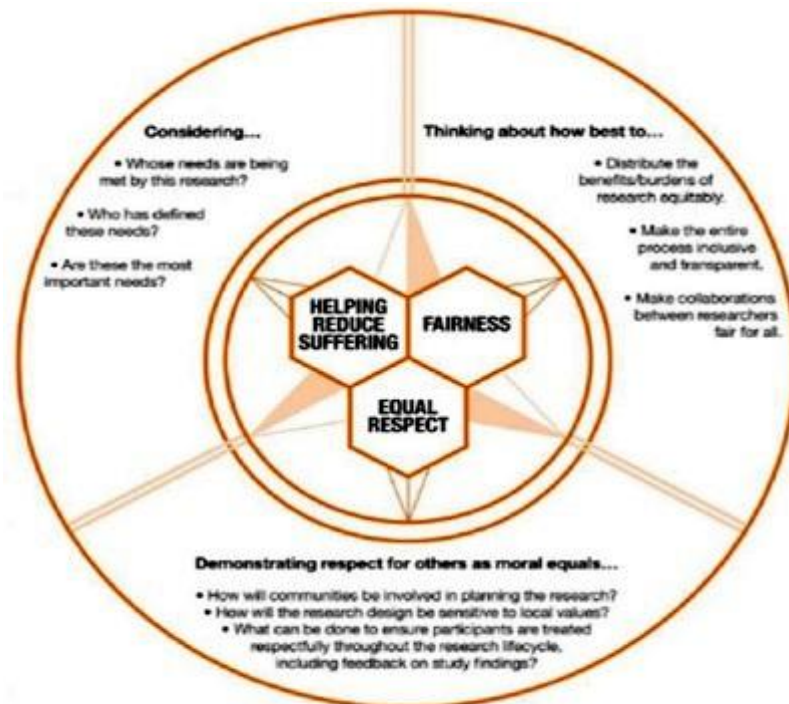
2020). Bhattarcharya et al (2020) identified some of the practices such as as extracting knowledge from middle- and lower-income countries without explicitly acknowledging where it has come from.

Beyond the Pandemic, it is important to decolonize social research, and as Leon-Himmelstine & Pinet (2020) puts it, 'the pandemic-induced disruption to traditional research practice offers a moment to set this right and work towards decolonizing development research. For Renton et al (2020), this means 'putting on a new coat – decolonizing knowledge is at risk of being reduced to an 'add on' to existing practice, as opposed to displacing it. In this respect, it is similar to the critiques of the 'buzzwords' of gender mainstreaming within development.' The shift to online platforms to replace seminars and conferences during the pandemic has demonstrated a capacity for international conversation that is essential for decolonizing development research (Barei-Guyot, 2021).

A key element in decolonizing research post-COVID-19 is to address the growing issue of safeguarding; as such, Orr et al (2019) identified nine key principles for safeguarding practice in International Development research, addressing power dynamics through the inclusion of principles such as recognizing the risks created through dictating standards, creating a space for clear communication and mutual learning, and having a consistent awareness of power differentials. It is also important to pay close attention to the dynamics of vulnerability, risk and harm, which are contextual and directly shape research relations and practice. According to WHO (2020b), researchers should work towards using carefully considered ethical standards and guidelines. Maglio (2020) recommended that Safeguarding should be at the forefront of all studies while digital safeguarding in particular should be promoted with an increased intensity thanks to the new reliance on digital tools and methods in International Development research.

Wright & Harvey (2020) developed an 'ethical compass' which comprises three core ethical values: helping to reduce suffering by acting in accordance with fundamental duties, founded on solidarity and humanity, to help those in need; demonstrating respect for others as moral equals ('equal respect'); and fairness, which includes both duties of non-discrimination in the treatment of others, and the equitable distribution of both benefits and burdens. These ethical values are shown in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1 Ethical Compass



Source: Wright & Harvey (2020).

Finally, efforts to decolonize research and knowledge should cause reflection on the meaning we give to international development and the way we engage with others in the course of researching. The travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic have forced a change in research partnerships, presenting a unique moment in which power imbalances can be addressed (Leon-Himmelstine & Pinet, 2020). Newman (2020) views Collaborative research as a sustainable means to replace traditional, unequal power relations between researchers from higher-income countries and those in middle- and lower-income countries with partnerships that have equity as a core.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

From the foregoing discourse, it is apparent that prior to COVID-19 pandemic, there were existing inequalities among social science researchers which must be urgently addressed within and beyond the new normal. Also, researchers should utilize available opportunities



provided by the new normal to engage in innovative and collaborative research that can influence policy and practice in the gender, humanitarian and development sector. Thus, this Paper recommends a research-policy-practice nexus approach that integrates innovative tools and collaborative strategies for undertaking social research towards sustainable development. Also, equitable research partnerships and equal respect among researchers, institutions, countries and regions should be encouraged in order to decolonize knowledge and research and reposition the social research community to produce innovative research findings that are not only relevant but are timely and address core needs and aspirations of the era.

Finally, it is pertinent to note that Redeemer's University, Osun State is the very first in Nigeria to introduce the Post Graduate Studies in Gender, Humanitarian and Development Studies; as such, repositioning the academia and students to deepen their engagements in social science research in the context of the New Normal and beyond, is key. Therefore, as a PhD Student of the esteemed Centre for Gender, Humanitarian and Development Studies of the Redeemer's University (known in this Paper as the 'Centre'), it will be exciting to see the Centre emerge as a Centre for excellence on Collaborative Social Science Research where the University community is deeply engaged in producing innovative research that can positively influence policy and decision making as well as developmental action and programming across the Country and beyond.

Specifically, the University Management through the Post Graduate College and in collaboration with our Post Graduate Students Association for Gender, Humanitarian and Development Studies<sup>1</sup> should encourage more scholarly work, collaborative research and research-tourism in the areas of Gender, Humanitarian and Development Practice among the Student and University academic staff so as to learn, document and share new skills, innovative and best practices as well as experiential tools that can help the University to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda. The Post Graduate College can collaborate with the Centre and its Post Graduate Students Association to champion the adoption and application of GSS and SPSR tools in social science research across Nigeria. Such research findings should be shared with policy

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<sup>1</sup> Our Findings revealed that our Association (for which I am the Pioneer President) is the very first formalized Post Graduate Students Association to exist since the inception of Redeemer's University seventeen years ago, thanks to Prof. Olabisi Aina and the Centre for inspiring us to pioneer this Association June this year 2022.



makers, Government Institutions, the organized private sector, academia and research institutes, media, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), faith-based and traditional institutions, networks and unions, gender specialists and humanitarian and development practitioners to influence their policies, planning and administration, programming and developmental actions.

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