**UPDATE ON ESTABLISHMENT OF STATES RESEACH INSTITUTES IN NIGERIA**

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**AUGUST, 2016**

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**Introduction**

Basically, a research institute is an establishment created or endowed for doing research. Indeed, research institutes may specialise in different types of research ranging from basic research, applied research to policy research. There are many research institutes in the social sciences for sociological and economic research. With respect to this paper, which partly relates to establishing State Research Institutes along the lines of Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), steps are provided on why and how they can be established. Indeed, the growing consciousness of the need for knowledge based economies that depend considerably outputs of research cannot be overemphasised. Many countries around the world gain from the results of research institutes, which often form the basis for informed actions or policy decisions. Generally however, states in Nigeria are not favourable disposed to establishment of research institute. Nevertheless, what follows this introduction are the relevant steps to be taken in establishing a State Research Institute.

**Approval, Purposes and Objectives of Research Institute**

Since the planned purpose of creating State Research Institutes is to assist State Governments with credible information and data (arising from research activities) as well as to provide research and policy advice, one of the critical steps towards their formal establishment is by seeking and getting approval of the State through appropriate legislative procedures. At the end of the day, there should be a legislative backing through a State Edict, for the Institute. In other words, there must be an approval of the Institute and its name.

The Edict will clearly state the purpose, objectives and statutory functions of the Institute. However, in line with current good practices, it is noteworthy for interdisciplinary institutes to be set up, in order to address specific issues and problems that are not only key to developing their research and policy advice base but for providing more holistic views of socio-economic issues. The proposed Institutes would, therefore, be expected to carry out collaborative and/or interdisciplinary research on socio-economic development issues and enhancement of research networking capacity and infrastructure. One of the reasons for their creation would also be to transfer and mobilise knowledge gained through research for the benefit of society, through a variety of appropriate mechanisms or channels. In short, the Institutes are expected to support efforts that would enhance the growth of the State through the quality of their research work.

**Staffing and Governance of Research Institutes**

***Staffing***

The Research Institutes would be expected to employ their own research, technical, and clerical staff on term appointments, subject to the relevant collective agreements, and the individual States’ human resource policies. Staffing is also very important. Members of the proposed Institute should be listed and their specific roles indicated, including those of Chief Executives and principal officers. However, overstaffing must not be allowed in order to ensure optimal staff utilisation and productivity. It is also advisable that the Research Institute should have a modest and not necessarily a big beginning.

For maximum impact, it is important that the research institutes be restricted to groups of researchers that can fulfill well-defined criteria for their establishment and who can be held accountable and have clearly defined expectations. Indeed, the research institute will require compelling evidence that it will generate benefits to the State. All the Research staff must pursue excellence in research and must be productive and creative. The Research Institutes must always plan to raise new researchers (as the need arises) and network with other researchers.

There are different staffing models for Research Institutes or think tanks the proposed State Research Institutes may want may want to consider the following:

* **Working with associates**: they are probably employed somewhere else and therefore bring their credibility and expertise to the new organization. This is not likely to cost the State Research Institutes much. However, it may be harder to plan and coordinate things with them.
* **Combining a few senior researchers (associates, for instance) with young (and relatively inexpensive) research assistants**: some of the best works in think tanks or research institutes are done [by young researchers](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/attracting-and-developing-young-talent-how-can-think-tanks-manage/). They may not stay long but they can be relied on to work hard. Furthermore, they will be more likely to know how to take full advantage of all that [digital tools](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/using-digital-communications-to-connect-at-a-human-level-for-maximum-impact/) have to offer.
* **Work in** [**partnership**](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/north-south-collaboration-towards-a-more-equitable-deal/): A cohesive agenda that can guarantee good content and networks is vital for the Research Institute.
* **Combining consultancy with core think tank tasks**: Research Institutes can combine income generating research consultancy with think tank type communication and outreach work. This works most of the time but it can be challenging to maintain the right balance for the Research Institute. Under this model, the Research Institute could attract consultants who are interested in playing a more public role in society by allowing them to raise their own income in exchange for an overhead charge that pays for central costs.

***Governance arrangement***

There are different governance arrangements available for Research Institutes. Coming up with one that works for all State Research Institutes may be very difficult. Nevertheless, the following arrangements could be considered:

* [**A board or governing body**](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/think-tank-boards-composition-and-practices/) that is independent from the management of the think tank and that is ultimately responsible for its long term vision.
* **A competent executive direction** including a competent manager at its centre.
* **A tier of ‘senior’ managers or researchers** that is responsible for oversight of the three main aspects of any Research Institute’s work: research, communications, and management.

[Board members](https://onthinktanks.org/2013/03/25/think-tank-boards-composition-and-practices/) should not just be subject matter experts but people who know about think tanks and various aspects of their work (including management, communications, fundraising and so on). They must be people who can dedicate enough time to support the Research Institute. In addition, there is the need to clearly describe the organisational structure and function as well as the operational plan and roles of relevant committees. The Research Institutes are expected to get some big names in the social sciences field on the governing boards for credibility.

**Getting advice and Defining the Scope of the Research Institute**

Starting research institute or a think tank can be difficult. They should continuously seek advice and lessons from the experience of older research institutes. They must also be guided by the following:

* Having good networks in academia and/or in politics.
* Having great imagination to think and find solutions to problems (and articulate them) as well as translate policy problems into projects for the improvement of the livelihoods of the people of the State.

It is critical to plan for a Research Institute that covers all aspects of public policy, bearing in mind some points. It can begin with policy issues that researchers already have an expertise on. This will save a lot of time and allow the Research Institute to hit the ground running, especially in respect of the problems to be solved. Their focus should not be on what is often termed ‘pro-poor issues’ and but also more mainstream and middle class concerns.

It is also important to define the Research Institutes’ political space. In other words, while defining the policy space of the Institute, their political space must also be defined, in terms of governance arrangement, extent of political interference, skills, and strategy. They must have core values that will help them to get support from funders and even draw the attention of future researchers.

**Funding, Supporting Resources and Budget**

Funding for Research Centres can be made up of a combination of multiple internal and external sources including but not limited to external funding agreements, Research Institute operating funds, non-recurring funds, indirect funding, and endowments. Funding sources may change and adapt over time. For State Research Institutes, State budgets are expected to be used to support them. There must be a funding plan that may include state resources, research direct or indirect revenue, endowment or gift income and so on. However, it must be noted that no single funding model works for all institutes. However, because what is being conceived are State Research Institutes, State Governments must be committed to sustaining them.

With respect to budgets, it may be necessary for State Research Institutes to provide a detailed budget plan for the first five years of their operation, specifying any income expected from all sources, as well as anticipated expenditures. If funds are requested from the State budget, the Research Institutes must explain and justify how the funds fit within the priorities of the ‘Strategic Areas of Socio-Economic Development’ of the State. The budget should also list current and future requirements and the strategic plan for obtaining the necessary infrastructure (space, offices, administrative support such as personnel and/or stipends, ICT, maintenance, library resources, and so on). The Research Institutes may also plans to sell services or products on a commercial basis, but must comply with the intellectual property and commercialisation policies of the States, if any.

**Visibility**

It is important that establishing a Research institute benefits both the State and individual members of the institute by enhancing their visibility. An action plan to rapidly achieve visibility for the institute (whether through Web pages, advertising, conferences, consultation services or so on) must be put in place. Web pages must include a plan for maintaining the site.

**Reporting Mechanism/Dissemination of Findings**

There would be clearly defined channels of reporting research findings, first and foremost, to the State Government and other key stakeholders in the State (the legislature, MDAs and so on) as well as the format for disseminating research findings (memos, policy briefs, annual report and so on). Stakeholders’ meetings, conferences, workshops and seminars are also possible avenues for disseminating research findings. In short, **t**he Research Institute must define its package of outputs to be produced and delivered on every one of the policy issues it chooses to study.

**RELEVANCE OF THE STATE’S RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

In view of the fact that an equivalent of National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) exists at the State level in the form of State Bureau of Statistics, it may therefore be necessary to also establish a State Research Institute which is for example, may be an equivalent of Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) at the State level to carry out the same activities as NISER. The Institute shall be under the supervision of State Economic Planning Department. All the existing Departments of Planning Research and Statistics in the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in every State will now be coordinated by the State Research Institute. The suggested names for such institute are as follows:

* State Institute for Social and Economic Research
* State Bureau of Social and Economic Research
* State Office of Social and Economic Research.

**MANDATES:**

Similar to the mandates of NISER, but now localized to state on the basis of each state peculiarity.

**The Vision of SRI:** To be a recognized state think tank in the area of Social and Economic Policy Research.

**The Mission of SRI:** To consistently generate credible knowledge through good State Level quality research in line with established National Research Standards, while interacting with NISER and other relevant segments of Nigerian society in the task of state development.

The establishment of State Research Institute should be given a legislative backing through an act of the State House of Assembly. Against this backdrop, the act of the State House of Assembly that would establish the SRI should empower the Institute to carry out the following functions.

These are to:

1. Conduct Research into the Economic and Social Problems of the State with a view to the applications of the results thereof;
2. Organise Seminars and Conferences on problems of Economic and Social Development in the State.
3. Cooperate with NISER in the mobilisation of the State Research Potentials for the task of State Development and dissemination of research findings for the use of Policymakers at the State and Local Government Levels.

**MODALITIES**

1. Meeting of all Stakeholders including Planning Research and Statistics Department, LGAs representatives in all the MDAs and Local governments, Organized Private Sectors, NGOs and Development Partners. The process of the Stakeholders meeting should be led by NISER.
2. At the meeting of the stakeholders, participants are expected to evolve workable and implementable Research Agenda for the State.
3. The Executive brings up a bill for the establishment of State Research Institute for Legislative approval. Thereafter, the Act that will establish SRI should be gazetted and a government working paper emerges from this.
4. NISER shall undertake a general Research Capacity Building for all States Research Institutes that would be established in the area of Research Conceptualization, Research Methodology (Data Collection, Data Analysis, Modelling, and Forecasting) and Professional Report Writing.
5. NISER will provide full guidance and institutional start-up support for a period of one year.
6. After disengagement from the initiation stage, NISER shall continue to collaborate and cooperate with SRI in Research Projects as necessary
7. The Anchor Ministry shall be the Ministry responsible for planning in the different States.

**Second Term of Reference: Conducting Collaborative Research with the States.**

With or without the Establishment of SRI, NISER shall endeavor to initiate collaborative Research that will drive the development of the state within the Framework of National Development Agenda. The implication of this is that at every point in time the state government must operate within National Economic Development Blueprint that is provided by the National Planning Commission.

**MODALITIES**

1. There should be a Stakeholder meeting involving Research Institutes, especially NISER, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Development Partners where necessary. The meeting should discuss Key challenges confronting respective Stake Government in the area of Social and Economic Development.
2. NISER should lead the process of undertaking state resource mapping to update the existing Survey of States Resources undertaken by NISER in the past.
3. State should collaborate with NISER in the area of Socio-Economic Research for the Development of the various States and Local Governments.
4. NISER should support the state in strengthening the capacity for implementing Research Outcome.
5. NISER would provide facilities for mass Data Processing and Management.
6. NISER would regularly provide training and capacity building for Research at the State Level to ensure the sustainability of State Research Programmes and Projects.
7. NISER shall take advantage of its presence in the Six geopolitical Zones of the country to assist States in articulating Development Agendas. NISER Researchers should be clustered around the Six Geopolitical Zones for the purpose of providing technical support for the States in the respective Zones.

**CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, the proposal to set up State Research Institutes is a welcome development. Whatever the approach taken by individual State governments, the Research Institutes, when established, must have a clear focus and legislative backing as well as the definition of its unique contribution, mission and goals. It must develop a sound research agenda and financial plan along with criteria for benchmarking success. They should also try to keep their initial **staffing costs low** and **flexible.** Their funding must be sustainable in order to avoid low productivity or closure. The Research Institutes should explore the possibilities of partnerships, short-term consultancy arrangements, project specific contracts, and other contractual arrangements in the execution of their mandates. They must have good facilities and people to fill them and the right environment to get things done. There are in addition to taking full advantage of new digital tools and resources and some of the best practices from more established think tanks across the world.