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Between The Ideal and The Reality: Doing Sexuality Research in the Context of Public Policy in Nigeria.

By

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Introduction

The importance of sexuality and its obvious emergence as a development discourse especially in Africa is now a largely incontrovertible fact. Actually the menace of HIV/AIDS; the need for population control; the glaring challenge of reproductive health; and the spectacle of gender violence among others have repositioned the discourse and study of human sexuality and its various dimensions in the front-burner of important debates globally since the late twentieth century (see, Kimmel and Plante, 2004; Williams and Stein, 2002; Butler, 2004; Parker and Aggleton, 2007 etc.).

Perhaps what has obstructed our full realization of the overriding impact of sexuality in human existence has been the fact that knowledge production in the social and behavioural sciences had consigned sexuality to the rubric of the biological and health sciences. As a result there was the marginalisation of human sexuality as an area of research and study by these disciplines till the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the last three decades (see, Parker, 1996). It was the concern with the AIDS pandemic that swayed attention of the social and behavioural sciences back to the reality of human sexuality as an overriding fact of human existence. Actually this *volte-face* and the neglect before it cannot be attributed to these disciplines alone since global efforts to comprehend sexuality has been driven largely by the challenges posed by the pandemic on human existence. However while the pandemic has largely motivated current business with human sexuality, the conceptualization of human sexuality has gone beyond the narrow prisms of HIV/AIDS to open up a Pandora box of concerns often only remotely related to HIV/AIDS but seen as part

of the need for a healthy and thorough understanding and mastery of human sexuality.

Therefore, the focus on sexuality research stems from recognition of the fact that such research is key to improving the health and general well-being of people. As a matter of fact the need for research on human sexuality is perhaps more dire in the developing and resource poor nations of the world including Nigeria where a good knowledge of sexual health for instance, has become imperative to human survival and development. Therefore, as Ankomah (2004) aptly stated good quality research is a key tool for identifying sexual health problems and their causes. Such knowledge is obviously important in the quest for good health. But even beyond this apparent utilitarian aspect, the need for a thorough understanding of the vast range and manifestations of human sexuality cannot be overstated especially when it is realised that human sexuality does not just affect our health beliefs and practices but is often at the centre of human social well-being and promotion of good living. Be that as it may the high premium placed on sexuality research can only yield dividends if the context for research is conducive and promotes the implementation or utilization of research findings. It is in this light that public policies play an important role not only in engendering research but more crucially in ensuring that the fruits or outcomes of research are utilised in the quest for a better and healthier society.

Public policy is a concern to sexuality research because as have been observed especially in developing nations laws may either largely ignore sexuality or are made restrictive of sexuality. Thus, "in many countries, national constitutions and laws do not explicitly address issues related to sexuality. In others, the laws are restrictive and harmful. They may…deny equal rights to sexual minorities. Even constructive laws and policies may not be executed or enforced" (Ford Foundation, 2005:49).

Perhaps nowhere in West Africa are the above observations more typical of the public policy environment than in Nigeria.

Overview of Authorial Concept Position

Human sexuality as employed here goes beyond the conceptualisation of sexuality as having solidity within reproduction discourse. Therefore, I see sexuality as not only defining but more crucially mediating and influencing the choices people make in relationship to other people on a daily basis. This means that sexuality is an encompassing reality of human existence whether conceptualised as purely a biological function or as the ways and manners socio-cultural norms and psychological dispositions affect our notion of other people, ourselves and our bodies. Perhaps a simple illustration of the overriding pre-eminence of sexuality can be glimpsed in the fact that in simple acts like greeting and relating in official spaces gender often dictates levels of comfort. This does not just reflect our social and structural ideas of gender but also our definitions of human sexuality mediated through the physical body. Hence human sexuality embodies various related aspects of the human life including physical, psychological, socio-cultural and attitudinal orientations structured by the social environment, notions of bodies and perceptions of self in relation to others. In spite of the above general orientation an analytically productive notion of sexuality is to view it as having to do with the influence of biological and physiological endowments and dispositions on human relations and interaction. Therefore sexuality does not arise because one has a biological body but because that biological endowment or disposition is structured by socio-cultural norms and experiences and more critically affect our relationship with others and our perception of their bodies and biological dispositions.

In view of the above, I see the implication of sexuality more in terms of how it structures or mediates our interaction with others and how socio-cultural norms and social values endow us with perceptions of sexuality which more often than not becomes our standard in relating to others. All the same sexuality from the above conception is not just about reproductive activities or the quest for pleasure or fun but rather the totality of our being biological and social beings. As a result, it ideally should focus on our social disposition and character in relation to others. In this frame sexuality becomes concerned with biological, socio-cultural and psychological attributes of the human person which affects both personality development and social interaction in a given social system or society. In the ordinary sense of it, human sexuality involves our conception and reactions to such things as marriage, love, hate, intimacy, body and body images (or the social imagination of bodies), coupling, family etc and more critically how these (which are basically and largely products of experience and social living) affect our own and others self-esteem; social worth; social recognition and social acceptance.

Public policy as the name indicates emanates from government and its agencies[1] and can be seen as formal pronouncements regarding a given area of life. In other words, it is government's instrument for dealing with and responding to the social environment. Therefore public policies are reflective of the aspirations and needs of society as well as the government's reading and preferred response to such aspirations and needs. In fact, it must have been the recognition of the above that led Dye (1975) to define public policy summarily as whatever government decides to do or not to do. This implies that the government and its agencies make policies that reflect their own understanding of situations

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[1] Acting on behalf of and with mandate from the government. Although ideally and usually what government agencies do is to articulate policy positions for government and to implement policies made by the government.

and more critically have a choice over what becomes public policy. Generally the personal wishes or utterances of government officials do not constitute public policies since public policy is usually a matter of law and structured officialdom. In this case public policy has both legal and coercive force over the citizens of a given state or society. Also, public policy is a stated course of action by the government and its agencies within a given environmental setting and geared towards achieving a clearly stated objective or goal (see, Anderson, 1979).

It is also necessary to point out here that public policies are often taken as proactive tools for dealing with environmental challenges by the government and its agencies. In this case, they are often forward looking, dynamic and development oriented. Therefore, public policies are usually subjected to both impact assessment and evaluations as means of ensuring that policies are on track with regards to the anticipated goals and that new or unforeseen elements in the environment are taken into consideration.

But beyond its formalised, legal and procedural elements and the choice it confers on the government, public policies are ideally reflective of the values and prior learning or experience which we acquire as members of a given social group or as parts of a given interaction matrix. Even where public policies emanate from globally recognised or articulated needs, the course of implementation of the policy is often overtly influenced by social values and socially structured definitions of reality. No wonder similar policies aimed at similar general goals often produce distinctively different outcomes in different social contexts. For instance whereas a policy that legalises same-sex marriage may be globally articulated as serving the needs for sexual rights promotion, its adoption in the U.S and Nigeria will produce radically different results or outcomes.

The Social Production of Sexuality and the Policy Environment in Nigeria

Generally what emanates from the foregoing observations is that sexuality for us here is all encompassing human expression and situation and is largely a product of our social situation and social challenges. In this sense, the thinking that human sexuality both as discourse and existential reality is socially produced and purveyed is very apt. Therefore, one shares the assertion that, "prevailing codes of sexuality and sexual conduct in contemporary Nigeria are socially produced and fed by oppressive patriarchal subjectivities and ideologies that try to instil a sense of what is normal sexually-speaking for us all" (Izugbara, 2005: 13). Actually one can go further to posit that it is the above patriarchal subjectivities and straight ideologies that produce the values that guide public policy on sexuality in Nigeria and in this frame make public policies subjective to conservative normative ideologies and culturally strait-laced and largely unresponsive to change.

Sexuality in all essence is more of the outcome of social living than the thoughtless or erotic wanderings of the loner. Therefore, as Douglas (1973) notes nothing is more essentially transmitted by a social learning process than sexual behaviour. In this frame sexuality while embodying individual proclivities and dispositions is fundamentally mediated by social factors. Perhaps, the truism of this assertion is borne out by the diverse forms of sexual culture among different social groups. Even what is considered strange sexual orientation may often than not be outcome of the individual's reaction to social circumstances; the esoteric elaboration of basic sexual elements in culture; the expression of one's imaginations of social identity; the reinvention of a long forgotten sexual cultural element; dissension and even the need to belong or acquire a given social

status. In sum, sexuality is created in and through the interaction of people in a given social context.

Be that as it may, the well known reluctance and conservatism of government and policy makers notwithstanding, public policy response to human sexuality research and practice in Nigeria has been dogged by the tensions created by opposing and often conflicting notions and discourses of sexuality. In this sense, the existence of multiple discourses of sexuality created by ethnic, socio-cultural, religious and even different sexual orientations may have made policy response ambivalent in Nigeria. Perhaps this is responsible for the fact that comprehensive public policy responses are more identifiable in the areas of sexual health and more especially in the area of HIV/AIDS where the disease burden has served as a wake-up call for public policy makers and government and where evidence of the pandemic deconstructs ethno-social and geo-political distinctions and in the process greatly calms conflict and tensions in its discourse and engenders a multi-prong approach. But even in the case of the HIV/AIDS pandemic with its obvious deadly impact, policy response has often been burdened by socio-cultural and religious tensions and these have often hindered support for a more pragmatic but radical research culture and HIV/AIDS programming[2].

Be that as it may, some progress in public policy on sexuality has been made in Nigeria. Thus apart from the National Reproductive Health Policy launched in 2001 which ensures that even though reproductive health is on the concurrent legislation in Nigeria, all states' activities are guided by the policy; other relevant and striking sexuality policies include the National Sexuality Education Curriculum which implementation was

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[2] For instance, sexuality education research and programmatic efforts for youths in Nigeria has been burdened unnecessarily by the two world religions in the country and their leaning towards sexual abstinence prior to marriage. This creates difficulty regarding the appropriate sexuality education for youths. Equally, the condom message in HIV/AIDS control has been severely debunked by religious sects and even cultural groups that see it as promoting immorality and unbridled sexual activity.

authorised by the Federal Ministry of Education in 2002; there is also the National Reproductive Health Strategic Framework; the popular National Youth Policy; the good number of HIV/AIDS related policies and policy pronouncements etc.

Social Values, Sexuality Research and Public Policy

Actually what a critical review of the policy environment on sexuality in Nigeria would reveal is that the country still lacks what can be labelled comprehensive and consistent set of policies on sexuality and more worrisome is that there is obvious difficulty in implementing available policies especially in terms of monitoring implementation and in getting different sub-state governments to buy-into such policies or implement them. The above problems can be clearly seen in the area of the HIV/AIDS response where in spite of the considerable advance made on national policies on different areas of the response, implementation has been lagging behind and the states have responded in no equal or uniform manner to these policies. The fact of Nigeria's federalism entails that the sub-national levels of government must buy-in and replicate key national policies before they become effective or influential.

As already established our public policies are affected by our values both as members of a given society and as adherents to given set of beliefs especially from religion. Therefore the public policy response to sexuality in Nigeria has equally been affected by the values and beliefs regarding sexuality. Basically the government or agencies of government are made up of Nigerians who equally subscribe to the same set of values or normative patterns as those outside the confines of government. In the frame of the above Nigerians are largely sired in a socio-cultural setting in which patriarchy is defined as the normal order of things. In typical

patriarchal ideology women are seen as mainly reserve role players in the society while men are edified or promoted (see, Anugwom, 1999). However though the patriarchal ideology is still strong in Nigeria it is not a peculiarly Nigerian or developing society phenomenon since sexual asymmetry is almost a universal fact of human life (see, Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974). Be that as it may, Nigeria as a developing country is still marked by immense structural and culturally endowed sexual asymmetry that favours the male gender. Hence socio-cultural norms and even religious beliefs perpetuate the supremacy of the male. In such a case, the man is seen as dominant, superior, physically and sexually potent as well as powerful. As a result acceptable sexuality discourse is built around the imagery of the all conquering man who physically and sexually dominates the woman who is taken inevitably as the inferior, weak and meek partner in social and sexual spheres[3]. These notions are culturally reinforced and perpetuated through the socialization process. However and more crucial for us here is that patriarchy creates its own sexuality discourse and identities. Such sexuality discourse is anchored on the heterogeneous model of sex and the position of man straddling over a weaker and conquered woman. So the celebration of heterosexuality imbued in this imagination is taken as desirable and as consistent with acceptable socio-cultural norms establishing order and stability in the social world. Hence public policies are also made reflective of the needs and dominance of patriarchy as well as the

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[3] As a matter of fact the prevailing notion of women as chattels of men and their bodies as made for male conquest is common in lay narratives. A very mild form of this mindset though equally representative is the usual small adverts run by herbal doctors peddling all forms of sexual remedies in soft sell magazines and sports newspapers (for instance Complete Sports and SoccerStar). In typical fashion the adverts state that a man is only a man when he sexually dominates or defeats the woman. So a lot of these remedies are reputed in the adverts to make a man last up to four to five rounds of sex with a woman. But more telling is the claim that women run away from men who cannot go beyond one round. The extent to which this claim is true mirrors the fact that sexual dominance of the woman and her acceptance of this as only natural or given is a popular social imagery in Nigeria.

discourse of sexuality within the confines of patriarchy and heterosexuality.

In this sense, equally important in looking at the nature and process of public policy making in Nigeria is to realise that public policies are generally the response of the public institutions or government to factors or challenges in the social environment. In its ideal form, such policies reflect the values and aspirations or normative preferences of the social environment. The above relationship is probably more lucid in the area of sexuality where the values and beliefs of people go a long way in framing public policy responses. In relating the above logic to the Nigerian situation, it would appear that the groundswell of values, normative patterns and beliefs systems from which public policies emanate have not yet matured to accommodate radical, unfamiliar, emergent or unusual patterns and manifestations of human sexuality. However, while the above holds water, it is also possibly obvious that government has not really helped matters since it often gives stamp of legitimacy and encourages the emergence of values unsupportive of innovative public policy making. For instance, the denial of the existence of LGBTs by key government figures and the open support of these figures for the criminalization of certain sexual orientations reinforces conservative values and fuels an atmosphere of suspicion and animosity that ensure lack of public support. Also very critical in reinforcing conservative and reactionary values in the above regard is the role of the two world religions in Nigeria as institutions that define good and bad and morality and immorality.

But beyond the influence of social values and beliefs, the sexuality public policy environment has been affected equally by the general administrative lethargy and lack of foresight in government circles. Perhaps very indicative of the above is the fact that even where public

policies on sexuality have been proactive the implementation of such policies has been neither holistic nor systematic. In such a situation, a slash-and-burn approach which defeats the obvious need for incremental policy making has been favoured. An incremental approach to policy making in the area of human sexuality would have been more fruitful and productive since this approach encourages building on experience and improving or expanding this in subsequent policies. Moreover, it is anchored on the recognition of public policies as holistic or comprehensive rather than discrete and unrelated. Hence while sound public policies on HIV/AIDS may be popular and welcome, the denial of the existence of sexual minorities or the treatment of such inclinations as the perverse drive of a few maladjusted citizens may in the long run erode the policy and development gains made in the area of HIV/AIDS especially if one recognises that human sexuality is encompassing.

Without doubt there have been marked improvements in public policy on sexuality in the last five years in Nigeria. Even before this, the actions of the government especially in launching the reproductive health policy in 2001 and the couple of legislations around HIV/AIDS shows a considerable level of response. However, the policies have not been really proactive but rather where substantial damage (be it in loss of life; diseases; afflictions) or the potential for it confronts the citizenry and there is a groundswell of popular support for the envisaged or desired policy. No wonder the giant strides in public policy on sexuality in Nigeria has occurred mainly in the area of sexual and reproductive health. While such policy responses are welcome they also mirror a glaring inability on the part of the government and its advisers to perceive the systemic nature of human sexuality. In this case, a viable policy approach should ideally be comprehensive and encompassing and cognisant of the

fact that policy backwardness in one area of sexuality often has at least an indirect impact on the others.

In assessing public policy response to sexuality in Nigeria it is equally important to appreciate that even though the state apparently promotes gender equity especially in official and public circles, the state itself is embedded in the prevailing patriarchal mould as the larger society. Hence, even when the government approaches public policy the embedded and culturally sponsored patriarchal ideology and notion of gender prevails. This is especially the situation in a country like Nigeria where in spite of overwhelming socio-cultural diversity, primordial factors play dominant roles in determining the direction of public policy. Hence, issues like ethnicity, community, cultural grouping, belief systems and geo-political identity affect the direction of policy even in the area of human sexuality.

Basically it would actually be delusive to think about a value-free and totally objective state in the sexuality policy arena. As Epstein and Johnson (1998) have stated even where state policies and public discourses appear asexual in general, they have always had sexual categories and preferences embedded in them. They actually go on to argue that it would be hard to conceive of a state or nation that does not address its citizens in sexualised or gendered terms no matter how explicit or otherwise. This underlines the fact that sexuality public policy may more often than not represent the prior held or conceived notions of sexuality and gender by the government or its agencies. Such notions as already argued are the products of social values regarding sexuality which are in the case of Nigeria reinforced by religious beliefs which are mainly reactionary, parochial and immune to the needs for sexual freedom and rights as well as the failure to conceptualise sexuality as evident in diverse modes in every day social life.

Gaps in Sexuality Public Policies in Nigeria

Generally the sexuality public policy focus in Nigeria has undermined research in indigenous theorization of sexuality which reflects authentic African scripts and cultures of sexuality and is invaluable to the efforts to promote healthy sexuality and general well-being.

One area of severe dearth of public policy on sexuality in Nigeria is in the area of sexual rights. While there is no denial of the existence of diverse sexual inclinations or dispositions amongst Nigerians, public policies have overwhelmingly focused on the narrow so-called straight and heterogeneous sexuality discourse. This approach while cognisant of received wisdom and ideal socio-cultural norms is totally inconsiderate of the sexual rights of citizens whose disposition may not match handed-down straight sexuality format. In this manner sexual rights are legislated out of the domain of human rights and society is seen as existing only for the benefit of the majority. Without doubt, sexual rights are part and parcel of human rights. Therefore, the development of a society in which human rights and individual freedom hold sway demands that the sexual rights of individuals are not legislated out of existence or criminalised and stigmatised.

Perhaps where the greatest public policy paucity on sexuality in Nigeria exists is in the area of capturing emerging issues and trends and the effect of this on both research and intervention in these areas in Nigeria. Without doubt the most prominent show of the inability of policy makers to deal with emerging issues in sexuality is typified in the response to sexual rights especially with regards to LGBT. The Nigerian

same sex marriage act which is both popular and unpopular[4] proposed in 2006 does not just outlaw same sex marriage but more crucially criminalizes such acts and efforts or activities that support them. More poignantly for sexuality researchers and activists is that the law prescribes punishment for *'person who goes through the ceremony of marriage with another of the same sex, performs, witnesses, aids or abets the ceremony of same sex marriage'*, or *'is involved in the registration of gay clubs, societies and organizations'*, as well as *'prohibits any public display of a same-sex amorous relationship'*. In summary, apart from the human rights denial it confers on the LGB community it also proscribes the promotion of the above activities in whatever guise[5]. This creates a big challenge for research in the area of sexual rights and choice and challenges both activism and programming in these areas[6]. In such an operating environment, researchers and organizations working on sexuality often settle for the popular and commonly accepted areas like sexual health, violence against women, gender discrimination, sexuality education[7], HIV/AIDS etc. while such a safe approach which only permits the pseudo or proxy dealings with issues seen as either provocative or outlawed by the state may not readily satisfy the yearnings or desires of multi-lateral funding agencies, they are really necessary to keep the work going while gradually breaking down the walls of resistance of public support and policy.

However, it is important to realise that quite a lot of the progress made in the areas of policies on sexuality owes a lot to the activities and

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[4] Defined by the side on which one is. It was more like the traditional conservative and religious straight sex advocates versus the radical, strange and reformative advocates (inclusive of LGBTs and civil society groups)

[5] Meant to allow the stretching of the things covered by the law and give the law enforcers the room to interpret the law to suit their convenience or that of influential personages and groups in the society

[6] Actually organizations like the ARSRC which are expected as regional bodies to take cognisance of emerging issues in sexuality are marooned between a rock and a hard place

[7] Often nuanced in order not to elicit the ire of socio-religious bodies as the pioneering efforts of Action Health Incorporated (AHI) in this area has shown

advocacy of civil society. More often than not government has been literally hounded into the policy pronouncement by these groups and individuals. This is by no means a peculiarly Nigerian scenario since even in the developed societies of the world civil society has always functioned in the vanguard of advocacy and push for radical policy change. However what may be striking about the case of Nigeria is the obvious policy lethargy in government circles and the almost abdication of the responsibility for articulating policy needs of the citizenry by the government especially in the area of sexuality. The above facts are also responsible for the glaring non-implementation and monitoring of policy and program implementation as well as the culture of denial which has dogged the public sector sexuality discourse[8] in Nigeria. Given the undoubted relevance or imperative of sexuality as a whole to development dynamics in the country, a more responsive public policy environment is long overdue in Nigeria.

Building a Bridge: Sexuality Research and Public Policy in Nigeria

A critical and challenging area of public policy in Nigeria is the appropriate response to the fact of same sex relations and even marriage. While one may not advocate for a given position, evidence would suggest that unlike what is bandied about by patriarchal apologists and conservative ideologues, such sexual relationships are neither totally new, alien or strange in the Nigerian socio-cultural space (see for instance, Murray, 2000; Boykin, 2002 etc.). Therefore though the practice of homosexuality is unpopular in Nigeria and is religiously tabooed, outright outlawing of same sex relations as the case is in Nigeria represents the

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[8] Not just defined as heterogeneous but an inclusive and all-embracing discourse anchored on ensuring sexual rights of all citizens

denial of sexual rights which are currently seen as very important component of human rights. Perhaps the policy challenge lies squarely in avoiding infringing on the human rights of sexual minorities while at the same time not promoting minority sexual orientation as radical sexuality research and advocacy is often accused of doing.

While one acknowledges that the policy environment in Nigeria has not always been supportive and adequately responsive to sexuality research and intervention there is need for sexuality scholars and activists to also reinforce their influence on the process of policy making. Often times, policy backwardness and paucity emanate from the dearth of information, knowledge or evidence-based findings with which to prod forward policy makers most of who are not in the centre of sexuality discourse. Perhaps this need to influence policy is in tandem with the well known fact in social science disciplines that research and practice[9] affect each other. Actually the above logic has been well captured in the notion that, "public policies have a major impact on sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights. In turn, developments in sexual health and rights can initiate change in public policies" (Ford Foundation, 2005:49). Therefore while we moan endlessly about the dearth of supportive public policies on human sexuality in Nigeria, it behoves on us still to put more efforts towards using the evidence-based facts of research to influence public policy especially in the areas of sexuality where such need is greater.

The challenge before sexuality researchers is to continually turn up evidences that support policies that promote positive, healthy and respectful sexuality in Nigeria while at the same time providing evidence that makes a case for repealing obnoxious or regressive policies as well as providing advocates with facts to nip in the bud counter-productive sexuality policy making processes and their supportive discourse. In other

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[9] Read also policy or policy guidelines

words, research must continue to generate evidence or tools for tackling the definition of sexuality along reactionary, conservative and parochial lines which often feed policy response.

Therefore the task before us as evidenced in the foregoing discussions is to put in more efforts towards influencing sexuality public policy making and implementation or enforcement through research. This entails using research not just as vehicle for the production of knowledge but focusing more attention on using the outcome of research to influence public policy in Nigeria. Hence one subscribes to the idea that, "advocacy work is greatly needed to bring about changes in government laws and policies, to press for and inform their implementation, to monitor their progress and to assess their impact" (Ford Foundation, 2005:49). Perhaps to achieve the above there is need for strategic dissemination of research findings and the use of proactive advocacy. In other words, the dissemination of such research findings should be in such a manner as to capture the attention of those in charge of policy making or articulating policy positions for the government. In the same sense, advocacy should strive to be ahead of government policy decisions and in so doing force the hands of policy makers or build public support for desired policy change.

Concluding Remarks

The overall gap in Nigeria's sexuality public policy may be seen in the inability of the policies to adopt an affirmative human rights orientation to sexuality. Where this is done, government and public institutions would be at the forefront of providing services and education; resources for intervention; equality and creating a free space for expression of sexual diversity; sexual rights and freedom to all citizens

regardless of gender and primordial affiliations. In this sense, the public policy environment on sexuality is restrictive and therefore sets some limits on the type or nature of research and even activism one can pursue in Nigeria. In this sense involvement in such issues like same-sex relations where the law is heavily restrictive may have implications not only for the acceptance and operational application of findings but more crucially for the security and safety of the researcher concerned. This is not helped at all by the fact that prevailing socio-cultural norms or the normative patterns of the majority see such activities as unacceptable and antithetical to the social ethos of the society. But beyond the above recognition is that the restrictive policy environment on sexuality ironically opens up research niches and challenges both the imaginations of sexuality researchers and the tenacity of sexuality advocates. These two factors call for the subtle and innovative challenge of public policies by sexuality researchers and more critically a need for sexuality research to be more attuned to the demands of the society[10] and paucity in public policy in Nigeria.

While one may applaud the transcendence of sexuality from the biomedical sphere to a booming and active study and research area in both social and cultural studies (see, Williams and Stein, 2002; Seidman, 2003 etc.) such a proliferation would only impact on development and quality of life if there is a substantial link between the results of research and policy. This is especially crucial in a developing nation like Nigeria where the link between research and practice, research and policy and research and development is often obscure. The prevailing atmosphere which largely links sexuality especially in terms of rights and freedom of

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[10] Especially the needs of sexual minorities that have been ignored by public policies on sexuality in Nigeria

orientation to the private sphere of the individual[11] is counter-productive. Therefore the need to rescue human sexuality from the strangle-hold of socially and morally conservative discourse which envisage it as more or less the private affairs of a few maladjusted individuals and groups in the society and therefore undeserving of full public policy attention remains still with us in Nigeria in spite of whatever stride has been made in the last five years.

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[11] Except where directly related to health and disease like in HIV/AIDS; need for population control and also health as in reproductive health

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