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# Gerontology: Service, Education and Research Plan for Future

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# Envisioning the Future Direction of Applied Gerontology in Nigeria: Research, Services, and Instruction

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## RESEARCH FOCUS

### Issues to be Addressed

In traditional, simple, pre- industrial and pristine societies of Africa, older people were usually given to being accorded a great deal of respect. Among cultures that included the Age grades as obtained in Akwa Ibom State and much of the South- South geopolitical zone or the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, the elders, had a major- often the final say over matters of importance to the community. Within families, the authority of both men and women had the tendency to increase with age. In both the family and community organizations, authority of the elders carried the sanctions of the ancestors.

In contrast to the above, paradoxically, in the modern, complex advanced industrial societies characterized by urbanization, migration, complexity, heterogeneity and industrial bureaucracy, older people tend to lack the exercise or command of authority within both the family and the wider social community. Having retired from active labour force participation in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, older people tend to steep down the poverty lane than ever before in their lives. Even at this, there has been a phenomenal increase in the proportion of the population aged 65 years and older occasioned by an equal increase in life expectancy from a dismal 45-57 in the 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s to over 60 in the 1990s and this new millennium. This increase is due, as researches have shown, to relative improvement in nutrition, health

care delivery system, standard and level of education, conditions of service in the work force and freedom of choices now at the beck and call of individuals caused by globalization, democratization and political participation.

The transition to the age- grade of elder in a traditional culture/ society like Nigeria's Niger Delta Region in a modern industrial system inevitably heralds unintended consequences. Since their children no longer live with them nor them with their children due to intervening variables, older people find difficulty making the "final" phase of their lives rewarding. The common place thinking prior now was that those who successfully cope with old age do so by turning to their inner resources becoming less interested in the mundane (material) rewards that social life offers.

While this view may sound true, those in associated old age activities, might actually find renewal in what I call "The Third Age" in which a new phase of education begins.

Managing this "third age" becomes an important sociological issue surrounding ageing for which envisioning future direction in Applied Gerontology seeks to address. This direction aims to:

(a) assess the impact the older people exert on the economy and therefore the development process of the Nigerian state nay the Niger Delta Region.

(b) examine the nature and psycho-social aspects of ageing in Nigeria's South-South.

(c) identify and explain the major factors determining the pattern of aging in a third world society or economy and

(d) make suggestions by way of policy recommendations towards a more effective method of managing the aged in a changing society.

### Methodological Approaches

In the social sciences, various methods ( strategies ) are normally adopted in conducting various research interests. Because Applied Gerontology as an academic discipline germane to the University system in Nigeria and by extension its application to the social reality of the Nigerian state, matters arising in the field will determine research focus which may be either of Historical, Descriptive or Survey methods. This will imply taking a holistic historical perspective on or of ageing in Nigeria- nay NDR- from the pristine of times in the simple pre- colonial pre- industrial Nigeria. The evolutionary pattern and attitudinal changes occasioned by culture contact with the west at both the colonial and post-colonial state transforms the idea of Ageing and the need to subject it to a critical methodical sociological study will form part of the analysis. The ethnography of the study locale will come under focus and the use of critical components of methodological approaches such as Qualitative and Quantitative methods, IDI (i.e. In-depth Interview), FGD (Focus Group Discussions) and Participant Observations on ADLs and IADLs are all tools to use in studies/ researches in Applied Gerontology.

The vision, mission, philosophy and theoretical issues involved in studies of Applied Gerontology will serve as determinant factors influencing the choice of

research/methodological directions in Ageing Studies in Nigeria may the Niger Delta Region (NDR) in years to come.

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## Service Development Plan

### Vision-Likely Direction

Arising from the associated issues of ageing in a society in transition like Nigeria and its component parts, successive administrations in Nigeria did not see the need to formulate social support services with a view to addressing the dire needs of the Elderly population cohort. Thus, the issue of ageing and the aged as a social category in the political economy of the nation state was not nor has it been into consideration on the presumptuous belief that the informal care structure of the nuclear and extended family social network and care processes were/are quite adequate in addressing the care needs of the Elderly.

But with the growing trends in the social service and care practices for the Elderly in the US, OECD countries and other climes, a developing or emerging economy like Nigeria that believed that growing old and dying were natural processes is beginning to show growing concern by taking steps towards care practice that will enable the Nigerian Elderly age gracefully and in-place.

To this end, the likely direction of the vision of ageing programme needs to target the health and physical wellbeing of the Elderly through community-based programmes like Day Care Centres that promote active ageing, healthy lifestyles, nutrition, medical screening/referral, wellness and fitness through ambulatory health care practices and ageing in place.

## Initial Plan - Needs Assessment, Planning Committees, etc

Their needs should be surveyed by use of Research Methodologies outlined earlier. Needs such as balanced nutrition, physical exercise, therapy, etc should be incorporated into the care needs of the Nigerian or NDR Elderly.

The above goes particularly to the various Planning Committees put in place from the federal, state, local to the community/ village levels which should incorporate and factor in the needs of the Elderly age cohort. My own experience with the UNFPA(2008) , UNH4 (comprising WB,UNFPA,WHO& UNESCO(2012) both as State Co-ordinator ( Qualitative) and earlier involvement with the Presbyterian Elderly showed that the Nigerian Elderly prefer to age in-place –implying their homes/environments they are used to and familiar with. Institutional Senior Care Centres as obtained in the US and OECD countries appear strange, alien incomprehensible and carry a toga of stigmatization in Nigeria but it is hope that with passage in time, changes in the informal nuclear and extended family care supports, Institutionalization of the Ageing population may offer some prospects in the extant future in Nigeria.

Federal, state, local and community-based institutions in association with non-state actors like NGOs, FBOs and individuals should be co-opted into the planning and execution processes of Senior Care Centres in Nigeria. The experimental ones should be the hybrids of SeniorsIn Motion, Adult Day Care Centres and The Good Samaritan Society in Denton, North Texas, USA. The Pilot Centres should be in the urban centres before taking to the rural communities. The Needs Assessment Surveys and Post-

intervention Surveys (The Baseline) should be continuous with feedback mechanisms to ensure effective management of the care needs of the Nigerian Seniors.

## Curriculum Goals

### Vision - Undergraduate and Graduate Reform and Direction

Considering the training I have had the privilege of being a beneficiary in Applied Gerontology through the UNT-NUC/DAVE Omokaro Foundation in Nigeria, the initial ageing programme in Nigerian universities is targeted at commencing as a Postgraduate Programme. This aims at initially developing the manpower needs preparatory to starting undergraduate degree programmes during the 2016-2017 academic session.

As is well known, the processes involved in starting an academic programme as a unit or Department can be very cumbersome and tortuous in a typical Nigerian University. This is from the hindsight of my own experience as the Ag. Head (Chair) of my Department at the University of Uyo, Nigeria when it was my good fortune to originate and defend the PGD in Sociology and Anthropology even as a member of the Senate of the University. It was herculean but we succeeded because I was armed with hard rugged facts needed by all the channels of approval and Senate.

In envisioning Applied Gerontology for the Nigerian universities, introducing Undergraduate Programme and courses will be feasible and achievable if the required faculty (staff-student ratio/mix) are met. Departmental, Faculty, PG School, Directorate of Academic Planning and Senate Ratifications/ Approvals are very essential for the take off and then the Supervisory authority of the NUC. Each stage is a hurdle in itself. The



Directorate of Academic Planning is an important component for a successful commencement. The academic credentials and qualifications to impart knowledge in the fields are important. With the BMAS from the NUC now making the rounds in Nigerian universities, spirited efforts will be directed at meeting the requirements there from-the 1<sup>st</sup> step being to have successfully trained the trail blazers in the USA.

In my thinking and given the Timelines, a gestation period of 2014 - 2017 sessions would have been sufficient to enable the programme take off the grounds. This is so because apart from the staff components of the BMAS, the other essentials of an Applied Gerontology as a field of study is SPACE - offices, equipment, facilities as found in Denton, Texas and PRACTICUM or FIELD WORK or hybrids of same where the cases are found. Since the Nigerian Universities are under obligation to commence PG classes in September 2014, the course contents may have to be abridged or condensed to accommodate the pilot or experimental beneficiaries through use of modules for correspondence and interactions. In such a case, between 9-12 months with a nod from each University Senate involved in approving and encouraging its 'baby'. For the University of Uyo where I am, the ULTRA FITS Centre in the State Housing Estate ,Uyo could be adapted as a hybrid of the Senior-In -Motion(SIM), Denton, Tx in collaboration with the Proprietor, Air Marshall N.E. Eduok - and used as Practicum Site for students until interventionist facilities are in place. The Presby Senior Care Centre at Ikot Obong or Northern Uruan though very unkempt and undeveloped could be converted as a hybrid model of care centre for the Elderly. With these facilities though can never be

comparable with what obtains in the USA, the University of Uyo could serve as a Regional Centre for Ageing Studies in the South- South or Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

In consideration of the structure and organization of Applied Gerontology as witnessed in North Texas, the most appropriate Department to domicile this course or programme of study is the Department of Sociology or create a functional Department of Applied Gerontology with staff developed uniquely for it or selected from Sociology, Physical & Health Education (Kinesiology), Home Economics, Psychology, Legal Studies, Community Medicine and Nursing. Actually, the bulk of the course is in Sociology/ Social Work.

#### c. Potential Classes—2014-2017

With facilities in place, BMAS met and hurdles jumped at various stages of in- university branches/units... Dept., Faculty, PG School, Academic Planning & Development and Senate, it is very possible to commence lectures at the earliest in 2 years making 2016-2017 a potential take off date/year.

#### Summary

The charm of this paper has been my input and vision into the Future Direction of Applied Gerontology as a field of study in the Nigerian University system. In the process, I have seen that the NUC is treading a noble path to give direction for the commencement of ageing studies in Nigeria since the issue of ageing (old age) and dying are assuming determinate forms in the life course. Studies within the precinct of Nigeria conceived of the phase of old age which I call 'The Third Age' as period of neglect and destitution.

With 24 Nigerian Faculty on Ageing, the development of evidence-based research and advocacy will surely open safety nests & nets with a view to improving the lives of older people aged 65 and older. Ageing studies, noble as it is, must by NUC standard meet its BMAS to ensure that the programme of Applied Gerontology in the Nigerian university system delivers on what we append our signatures to. The necessary components of mounting Applied Gerontology are important and hence influence the future direction of Ageing Studies in Nigeria.