

We Need an Einstein in Every Ally McBeal

By: Mimi Haryani Hassim, DSc. (Tech)
GYA alumna
Malaysia

This article is very interesting as it studied how lawmakers in Nigeria made use of the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)-based information and evidence in policymaking related initiatives in Nigeria. STI has always been recognized as the main pillar in developing a diversified, sustainable, and competitive economy in many developing countries, including Nigeria. Such a robust economy guarantees a high standard of living and quality of life of the citizens, which is aimed by every single country.

Nonetheless, findings from this study reveal that most lawmakers rarely used this evidence-based STI information. Reliable source of information, accessibility to it, education level of the lawmakers, the background in science of the lawmakers and the partisan members, as well as number of years spent in the S&T-related committee are among the contributing factors. The study found that Nigerian lawmakers mostly relied on expert opinions, internet, and workshops/seminars/conferences as their main sources of STI information, instead of referring to the more formal and reliable, but least utilized source of academic journals.

To claim that the lawmakers did not put an effort to gain access to such information is not a justified statement at all. Rather, they were faced with the challenges of insufficiency, inaccessibility, obsolescence, and uncertainty of the integrity of the source of information needed on S&T.

The educational qualification of legislators nationwide is a critical factor which sets the direction of the policies formulated in the country. I mean, how could we expect a policy that is strongly supported by scientific-based evidence if we do not have anybody with a science background in the law- or policy-making team? In Nigeria, all legislators are capable to undertake their legislative activities, given that they hold at least a university degree. However, only one-tenth of them (respondents of the study) are from science background, which include medical sciences, agricultural sciences, and engineering field.

Beside education, experiences can sometimes be more important in making or producing the best in whatever we do. Of course, an executive chef with more than 20 years' experience is unbeatable in terms of cooking skill if compared to a freshly graduated sous chef from a culinary school. Most lawmakers surveyed in this study can be assumed as those with less experience. Approximately, only 16% have spent more than 4 years in a particular S&T-related committee. With such limited experience, we cannot expect these members to be experts in the field; hence, it is vital to keep them longer in the committee to help them learn and be more familiarised, matured, and well-versed with S&T-related terms, issues, and technologies, which can be well used when establishing a new law or policy.

Overall, STI needs to be accounted for in any new law/policy making. To do this, many factors are to be considered, but most importantly, a law/policy maker with adequate science knowledge or experiences is needed. Having an Einstein in every Ally McBeal will produce a law/policy that never neglects the element of science.

(493 words)