

PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

The context in which public policy is formulated and implemented in contemporary Nigeria has become an engaging issue. This is due in part to the globalization fervour and partly to the new democratic environment the country has found itself. While the former has allowed the inflow of knowledge and information about how governance in other lands are run, the latter has reinforced in the citizens, the idea that they are stakeholders in public administration and that the only way to preclude bad government is to ensure they take an active interest on how policies, which impinge on their daily lives, are formulated and implemented. This study attempts to study the actors and institutions involved in the country's public policy process, and the overt and covert factors which streamline their policy choice, within the period of 2000-2018. Suggestions were made on how to improve the machinery for public policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria.

Keywords : Policy, public policy, formulation, implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Public policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria has, in recent time, become not only an interesting area for scholars, but the entire citizenry at large. This situation is borne out of the fact that with the global emphasis on transparency, and accountability by governments in the west, the fact is coming nearer home that citizens can only expect good governance here if they are aware of and /or participate in the shaping of decisions that touch their lives.

Again, the current democratic setting with its emphasis on public policies ideally deriving from the people has also created additional impetus for citizens' interest in the process of legislative enactments and policy execution in the country. Indeed, for a developing country like Nigeria, with a poorly developed private sector, public policies if well formulated and implemented can prove to be the much need elixir to our development

inertia. Until therecent calls for a “roll back of the state” governments in Nigeria have been the greatest employer of labour retaining some of the best trained human resource in its sector. Unfortunately, all of these have not translated to the enunciation or execution of policies with positive impact on the ordinary citizens. The study covers the period of 2000-2018 on Nigerian public policy formulation and implementation process. This then leads us to the question on why the divergence between expectation and reality in terms of public policy? Answer to this and other questions will engage us in the remaining part of this research work.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Public Policy

To fully understand the concept of public policy, it may be necessary to make one or two illuminating comment on the word “policy”. According to Ikelegbe (2005:2) a policy simply means

... actions taken or to be taken and actions not taken or not to be taken by government or private organizations. It is a statement of what an organization wants to do, what it is doing, what it is not doing and what would not be done

Implicit in Ikelegbe's definition above is that a policy includes actions taken or actions proposed for the future (that is, intended actions). Interestingly, Anderson (2003) does not subscribe to this view that an intended course of action constitutes a policy. According to Anderson (2003:2) a policy is "what is actually done instead of what is only postponed or intended"; hence, he defined a policy "as a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actions in dealing with a problem or matter of concern". The two definitions however, have a point of convergence and that is that a policy differs from a decision in that while a policy has larger complexities and longer time perspective for its attainment, a decision is simply a choice made among competing alternatives. Put sharply, a policy establishes a broad framework within which discrete decisions are taken.

On the issue of public policy, Egonmwan (1991:1) says public policy is sometimes referred to as "government policy ". It is "whatever government chooses to do or not to do " (Dye, 1972:18). On his part, Friedrich (1962:79) defined it as a proposed course of action of a government which provides challenges and opportunities which the policy was supposed to utilize and overcome in an effort to reach a goal or realize an objective. Though these definitions have been broadly criticized (especially that of Dye who was criticized for including as public policy mere intentions of government or even her indecisions), yet they are all pointers to the fact that a public policy is a broad spectrum of activities that progresses from expression of intent by government, through formulation of goals, to its actual implementation. In specific terms, these definitions, convey interalia, that ;

- i. Public policies are courses of actions of a government and not the individual or private decisions of public officials,
- ii. Public policies are purposive or goal-oriented rather than random or chance behaviour of public officials;
- iii. Public policies are authoritative, legally binding and laced with legitimacy and force of government ; and
- iv. Public policies are more encompassing in effect than private sector policies; it touches on a wider spectrum of the population than do the private sector policies.

The implication of this last attribute of public policy is that if it is not well formulated and/or implemented the negative consequences of such a faux pas will be devastating for the people.

Public Policy Formulation

This is all the activities that occurs (or is undertaken) before a policy is enunciated by government. According to Ikelegbe (2005:77), it involves the “identification of the policy problem, the development and analysis of policy alternatives and the choice or selection of an alternative”. This definition is almost in tandem with that of Egonwam (1991:5) who had earlier in another context asserted that public policy formulation entails;

- i. Goal formulation involving multiple groups with sometimes conflicting interests;
- ii. Problem identification and delineation;
- iii. Agenda setting in which individuals and groups attempt to influence policy decisions;
- iv. Seeking out policy alternatives and weighing the consequences of each of them ; and
- v. Making the policy choice in form of decrees, directives, laws, acts, and guidelines.

Obviously, from the above processes, the ideal public policy formulation process is a very rigorous one; the process of which involves converting an endemic social problem/issue to a pandemic public problem, pushing it into the policy agenda of government and getting public officials to legislate on it. Hence, a policy, once formulated, is expected to be the result of a well thought –out process, pristine, with clear cut objective and intended to serve universal interest. It is however, doubtful if public policies formulated by government officials in the country embodies all these qualities, rather what we find is that most times public policies are formulated based on the interest, mood, whims and caprices of public officials (Epelle, 2011:55). Needless to say the result of the latter scenario will be misplacement of goals, weak political institutions and dismal policy results.

Public Policy Implementation

Except an adopted policy is implemented, it remains mere pronouncement, prescription or statement of intentions. Hence, public policy implementation “is the process of translating policy mandates into action, prescriptions into results and goals into reality” (Ikelegbe, 2005:83). Put another way round, policy implementation is the link between a formulated policy and tangible outcome, it implies the conversion of a formulated policy into concrete reality and enforcing it.

Interestingly, as simple as this process may seem, Egonmwam (1991:5) insists that it is the most difficult stage in the policy process. This is because, unlike the formulation process which may involve many actors working behind the stage to put the policy together, the implementation process involves actors who are either enforcing the legislation/programme and those at the receiving end, who are enjoying or experiencing the effects/consequences of the said policy. Beyond all these, Egonmwam (1991:5) notes that the implementation process is also affected by (i) whether the implementing agency will faithfully implement the policy as handed down to them; (ii) whether the policy itself is implementable (since public policies most times are stated in vague terms) ; and (iii) whether the change contemplated by the policy is implementable . Ikelegbe (2005:84) put the issues under discussion in clearer relief when he asserted that policy implementation involves the establishment of structure and methods, committal of funds, hiring of personnel or external agency where necessary, the socio-political and economic environment, the policy target group etc. Incidentally, these variables are not all available in the right quantity or at the right time; nor are they all easily manipulated to fit in line with the policy objectives. Consequently, the result most time is policy abandonment due to shortage of funds, policy misplacement due to incompetence or primordial interest of the implementers; or policy sabotage by target groups whose interest have been injured by the policy.

Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory

The elite theory, succinctly put, states that every typical society is divided into two groups (i) the few who have power and occupy by virtue of their power, top positions in the society; and (ii) the many who have no social influence or power, hence are at the bottom of the social ladder. The former who have power, though few in number, rule the people in the latter group. Consequent upon the above, public policy formulation and implementation is seen “as representing preferences and values of the governing or political elites. Thus, the suggestion that public policy is a reflection of the demands of the people is said to be a myth rather than reality “ (Okereke, 1998:35). This theory which was popularized scholars like Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills assumes that the masses are apathetic and ill-informed about public policy, hence, cannot be relied upon to drive policy matters. The burden is now left squarely at the feet of the elites to initiate policies and “push it downwards” to the masses.

In the Nigerian, context, the influence of the elite in the policy formulation and implementation process is irrefutable. Most times they (the elites) are the ones who determine what policies are to be enacted in the country and who is to benefit from such policies; and since they share consensus on certain social values, they ensure that policies made without their input or perceived to be against their class interest is sabotaged . A good example of this scenario is the anti-graft policy of government which has not been able to effectively checkmate corruption among the elites in the country.

FACTORS AFFECTING POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA.

1. Inadequate statistical data on the perceived public problem.

Obi, Nwachukwu & Obiora (2008:99) emphasized that public policy all over the world is aimed at solving public problem and enhancing the well-being of the people. This is achieved as the policy makers structure the policy to achieve a specific goal using the available records on the perceived problem as a guide. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, most public policies are formulated without adequate statistical data to guide the policy makers (Epelle , 2011:56),thereby leading to the inability of the latter to identify and tackle the specific cause of the public problem. The implication of this is that the policy ends up not addressing the real problem. For instance the issue of insecurity in the Niger Delta Region and the emergence of Amnesty Programme as a policy to end the insurgency and hostility in the region is a clear evidence that the Federal Government came out with the Amnesty Programme without adequate statistical data on the number of the actors, their activities, operational base, sources of finance, arms and ammunitions at their disposal, who are their collaborators etc. That is why the insurgency and hostility still persist in the region despite the Amnesty Programme by the government.

2. Poor Policy Focus and Objective.

Public policy is designed to guide and regulate the present and future actions of both the state and individuals on established public issues. This prompts Ikelegbe (2005:3) to see public policy as a set of government actions or proposed set of actions aimed at addressing specific public problem. However, it is obvious that in recent time, some public policies in Nigeria are enacted without clear policy focus, thereby making the said policy to lose its policy objective.

This is due to either environmental influence on the policy formulation process or lack of relevant information to guide policy formulation, the result of which is misplacement of policy objective and complication of the existing problem (Epelle, 2011:57).

3. Misconception and Misapplication of Policy Content

Ahmed & Dantata (2016) see policy implementation as the translation of policy objectives into reality, ensuring that the formulated policy is put into use. It is the implementation that brings the policy into limelight and accords it the relevant value in society. However, in Nigeria most policies are distorted due to misconception and misapplication of its content by some individuals and institutions who are negatively affected by the policy. On the contrary, those who are favoured are disposed to interpret the policy content accordingly and are willing to abide by it, believing such policy is capable of enhancing socio-economic and political development of the state. This divergent opinions on policy contents may lead to conflict of interest on such policy and affect its implementation. The “Change Agenda” policy of President Mohammed Buhari is a good example of a misconceived policy as some members of the opposition political parties, top bureaucrats, and some wealthy individuals who are beneficiaries of corrupt practices in the past has frustrated its implementation and achievement of its objectives in Nigeria.

4. The activities of Policy Actors in Policy making and implementation in Nigeria.

Okeke (2001:78) sees policy formulation and implementation as the interplay of activities of many individuals and institutions in the state. Obi, Nwachukwu & Obiora (2008) on their part identified individuals and institutions as policy actors and classified them as (i) official actors (legislature, executive, judiciary, state agencies etc); and (ii) non-official actors (political parties, pressure and interest groups, wealthy individuals etc.) The official actors operate within the state institutions and procedures, some individuals among them (elites) use their powers to influence the process, while the non-official actors in most cases play the opposition from the policy formulation state to the implementation. They carry out regular street protests, propaganda and lobbying against the policy. Today the proposed Cattle Colony Policy aimed at increasing cattle production and resolving the cattle herdsmen crisis in Nigeria is creating problems among the policy actors.

5. Weak Political and Administrative Institutions

Many government institutions are involved in both policy making and implementation in Nigeria; while some of these institutions are strong, others are weak in carrying out their assigned functions, thereby affecting the implementing and actualization of the policy objectives. It is on record that Nigeria has since 2000 established two principal corruption fighting agencies, EFCC and ICPC in addition to state security agencies. But suffice it to say that despite these agencies, corruption is still on the increase in Nigeria, which implies that these agencies are weak in carrying out their responsibilities, thereby affecting the implementation of other state policies.

6. Activities of Corrupt Politicians and Public Bureaucrats

Wilson (2018) identified corrupt politicians and public bureaucrats as those who use their office to divert state resources to private ends thereby depriving others of access to the same resources. This class of people in Nigeria's public service use the powers of the office they occupy to hinder the making and implementation of policies that may affect their corrupt practices, rather they encourage those policies that will give them more opportunities to divert state resources.

7. Political instability and inconsistency in Policy Making and Implementation.

There are issues of lack of policy continuity in Nigeria. Successive governments abandon the policy they inherited from their predecessors and go on to establish new policies on the same or similar subject matter. Such policies as ADP, DFRRRI, NALDA, School-to-Land Programme, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution etc were enacted at one time or the other but were not continued due to change in political leadership in Nigeria. This affects policy making and implementation as some policies are mere duplication in functions and objectives.

8. Lack of Political will to make and implement policies in Nigeria..

Roberts (2017) sees political will as political actions equivalent to the force in conventional wars. Meaning that political will is the political force to take political actions, although these political actions have social costs and benefits. Many Nigerian leaders have demonstrated lack of political will to make and implement certain policies to address socio-economic and political issues in the state. In 1999-2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo came up with the Independent

Power Project Policy to address poor electricity supply issue in Nigeria, but did not achieve much for eight years as the supply never increased. In 2007-2015, Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan noted the insurgency in the North Eastern Nigeria, but did not have the political will to address it. Today, President Muhammadu Buhari has identified corruption as a problem, but has not gotten the political will to fight it. Indeed, lack of political will affects the policy making and implementation process in Nigeria.

9. Irregular Evaluation of existing Policies

Most of the public policies in Nigeria are not evaluated on regular basis to identify their strengths and weaknesses, with a view to strengthening such policy where necessary; rather policies are abandoned and new ones made on similar issues, thereby leading to either policy duplication or abandonment in Nigeria.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA.

- Policy formulators should first generate adequate data/records on the causes of the perceived public problem before formulating a policy solution. The data so generated will guide the policy makers to identify the areas of perceived problem, causes of the problem and the need to structure the policy in such a direction to address the problem. This will enhance effective policy making and implementation in Nigeria.

- The relevance of any policy is its ability to achieve its objectives and reduce the identified problem in the state. Public policy therefore should be structured and designed with basic focus to achieve its policy objective. This will reduce the multiplicity of policies on a subject matter in the state and strengthen the existing ones to achieve desired result.

- There should be re-orientation of individuals and institutions on the need to see national policies as a guide to solving national problem and should be adhered to by all irrespective of political and ethnic affiliation. This strategy will address the problem of misconception and misapplication of public policy to satisfy personal, ethnic or political party interest.

- The interplay of activities of policy actors should be regulated by relevant state laws to avoid the overriding influence of elites against the public interest on national policy issues. This will act as a check on the activities of policy actors who use power and offices to unnecessarily influence the making and implementation of public policies in Nigeria.
- The relevant institutions involved in policy making and implementation should be strengthened by the government with necessary apparatus to function effectively. Such apparatus include adequate laws to regulate its operations, necessary funds, effective command structure, less government interference etc., to facilitate effective operation of the institution in policy making and implementation in Nigeria.
- There is eminent need for consistency and continuity in policies of the state. Successive governments should see governance as a continuous process and therefore all good policies inherited should be continued for the interest of the populace.
- There should be regular evaluation of existing policies. This will lead to objective assessment of the policies with a view to identifying their strength and weakness. It will also guide the state in future policy making and implementation.

CONCLUSION

Our discussion above on public policy, its formulation and implementation has shown in clear relief that public policy all over the world is employed in solving social problems hence enhancing the well-being of the people. Consequently, public officials are expected to structure public policies to achieve the twin goals of institution-building and socio-economic progress as this is the only way through which the welfare of the people can be improved. In a globalized world like ours, where events in one part of the globe is quickly relayed to the others parts it becomes even imperative that citizens of Nigeria are made not only to be part of the civilized world, but that the policy making process itself is made more efficient and more responsive to universal interest than to the elites primordial interest. Finally, it is our submission that when the study recommendations on the means to improve public policy formulation and

implementation in Nigeria are applied, Nigeria will have a better policy formulation and implementation process.

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