Policy Implementation and its Challenges in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This review is designed to critically evaluate the problems of policy implementation in Nigeria. For in-depth analysis, the transformation agenda of Jonathan's administration is used as a case-study. The central thesis of the work is that the effectiveness of public policy in solving societal problems is impeded by domestic factors. From the case-study analysis it was uncovered that such domestic forces as, lack of credible information, reliable statistics, manpower shortage, inadequate funds, corruption as well as over-ambitious policy goals are the problems. On the basis of the findings it is recommended among other things, that there should be a complete real reform of the entire policy framework. This exercise requires systemic policy initiative.

Keywords: *Policy implementation, public policy, domestic factors, corruption*

INTRODUCTION

Nations the world over device comprehensive strategies directed towards attainment of distinctive national goals. The transformation agenda of the present government is one of such steps. Nigeria has always witnessed well-articulated economic and social reforms intended to launch the nation on the path of meaningful development. A catalogue of such programmes abound; vision 2010, 2020, 7 point Agenda and many others. Nigeria has never lacked in setting up plans and putting processes in place. We have always been blessed with the best-planners, but the problem of implementation stands out to frustrate these lofty policies. The experience with policy implementation in Nigeria is that there is usually a yawning gap between intentions and results, between expectation and actual performance. A large number of unanticipated factors; political, economical, socio-cultural, and administrative and those related to legitimization, communication, co-ordination, staffing and control of policies and programmes usually change mainly in the course of policy implementation, thus dramatically influencing outcomes.

The problem with past governments in Nigeria has always been achieving required results. However, results can only be achieved when the vision is clear to all, the goals are broken down into simple manageable success milestones and responsibility delegated on the basis of competence and result periodically reviewed (Onabule, 2009). The transformation Agenda is achievable only if we can break from the past and chart a new course in the implementation process. We must realize that the primary goal of governance is to ensure that the services of a state are properly harnessed towards achieving an optimal quality of life for the people

of that state. The Transformation Agenda defines a framework for policy implementation to transform Nigeria by accelerating economic growth with the core objective of bequeathing a better living standard for the ordinary citizen (Onabule, 2009). This work is a review of some policy implementations in Nigeria. It also undertakes the analysis of implementation strategies with attendant challenges associated with policy implementation.

THE NOTION OF PUBLIC POLICY

Every nation of the world achieves economic and social reforms through well articulated development plans. This translates into public policy. This is because public policy is the government programme of action. It stands for various degrees of goal articulation and regulation of government activities. It is based on the belief that one can control and shape some major portions of his destiny. Public policy refers to important activities of government. It is whatever government chooses to do or not to do. To attain economic and social development, government pursues diverse versions of economic programmes and reforms to bequeath a prosperous socio-economic future.

The transformation Agenda of the federal government of Nigeria is one of such policies. Achieving the core objectives of this policy will put Nigeria on the path of recovery and growth, and ensure increase access to basic amenities of life for the citizenry. The formally articulated aims of public policies are the consolidation or furtherance of the public interest as usually justified by the authorities, although analysis may reveal self seeking or sectional motives behind many policies (Egonmwan, 1991). Inasmuch as public policies are developed by governmental bodies and officials, non-governmental actors may of course influence public policy development. According to Rein (1971) they are the people who engage in the daily affairs of a political system. These people are recognized by most members of the system as having responsibility for these matters, and take actions that are accepted as being binding most of the time by most of the mentors as long as they act within the limit of their roles (Ekpo, 2005).

Carl (1975) sees public policy as a proposed course of action of a person, group, or government within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunities which the policy was proposed to utilize and overcome in an effort to reach a goal or realize an objective or a purpose. It is also a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Anderson, 1978). The nature of public policy as a course of action can be better or more fully understood if it is broken down into a number of categories: these being policy demands, policy decision, policy statements, policy outputs, and policy outcomes. Public policy is therefore directed towards ensuring that government adopts appropriate policies to attain the "right" goals. Dror (1977) observes that policy is "fuzzy and extremely" gambling (Egonmwan, 1991). In his "optimal model of policy making", Dror (1977) states that it is not policy output that matters most,

but the structures and process through which policy is made. Practical effort should be made by the government to improve decision making through institutionalized analysis of policy issues in order to help policy makers make better and informed decisions. However, the government as a matter of necessity should always educate the masses affected by a given policy so that the good intentions of government may not be misunderstood.

THE CONCEPT OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

It has been claimed that Nigeria has often formulated good policies but these get bungled at the implementation stage (Eminue, 2005). According to George and Klauss (1979).

> *Implementation is nemesis of designers, it conjures up images of plans awry and of social carpenters and persons who fail to build to specifications and thereby distort the beautiful blue prints for progress which were handled to them. It provokes memories of a good idea that did not work and places the blame on the second (and second class) member of the policy administration team* (Egonmwam,1991).

Ekelegbe (1996) observes that implementation involves the committal of funds, the establishment of structures and methods, the hiring of personnel, the administering or executing of activities, and the security of policy goals, services and other intended outcomes. On the other hand, implementation refers to the process of converting human and materials inputs, including information, technical, human, demands and support, and so on into outputs in the form of goods and services. Certainly, in Nigeria, implementation is generally a function of administration and politics in co-operation with people. But the problems are that little attention is given to the subject of policy implementation by policy decision makers in Nigeria. There is the need for capable policy leadership to convert inputs-goods and services and tension capable of violating implementation. In the words of Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsey:

> *The separation of policy from implementation is fatal. It is not better than mindless implementation without a sense of direction. Though we can isolate policy and implementation for separate discussion, the purpose of our analysis is to bring them into closer correspondence with one another* (Egonmwan, 1991).

There is no gainsaying the fact that a policy is simply a statement of the goals and objectives of an organization in relation to a particular subject and the description of the strategy for the attainment of these goals and objectives. It incorporates a concern with the selection of goals, and the means for achieving them within a given situation. Policy is generally a guide to action for the achievement of defined goals. This becomes political discussions which are public discussions taken in public, governmental and formalized contexts and which produce public goods. Policies are action plans that drive a system. The system however cannot be driven if the

policies are neither implemented nor implementable. The implementation of a policy is the action part of the policy. It has to do with putting the policies into practice to test it viability. A good policy should be able to spell out clearly when and how it is to be implemented. Therefore, both policy formulators and implementors are key actors in the working of the entire policy driven system. Usually, the organization responsible for the implementation of policy is a unit of the government bureaucracy. Leadership is an input and a processing or conversion factor as it has ability to alter and modify other critical inputs in the implementation of any given policy or programme. The shortcomings, difficulties and failures that have attended major policies have helped to direct attention to the need for planning explicitly. This involves the management of policy implementation in which adequate attention is given to factors like political variables and institutional capacities to execute and operate development projects. So, the Transformation Agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria must be jealously guided on the implementation strategy to avoid the pitfall of previous policies.

WHY POLICIES FAIL IN NIGERIA

It has been observed that despite the lofty and painstaking policies usually formulated in Nigeria, little or no tangible outcomes have been achieved as they always tend to fall by the wayside. This is because the critical elements in both the internal and external environments and the implementation process account for the gap between goals and achievements. Nigeria has never lacked in planning, but the problem has always been achieving results. The Late Indian Prime Minister, Pandhit Nehvu lamented on similar situation in India saying.

> *We in the planning commission and others concerned have grown more experts in planning, but the real question is not planning but implementing the plans. That is the real questions before the country. I fear we are quite as expert at implementation as in planning* (Eminue, 2005).

A lot of factors account for the implementation problems in Nigeria; they include:

Inadequate Data: The death of data or relevant information is responsible for most policy failures in Nigeria. Nigeria lacks the culture of record-keeping and information-gathering. Most planning ministries or agencies work without data: even when one is available, most of the time is unreliable and defective. Chief Ernest Shonekan, the Chairman of Vision 2020 observes this when he said that he could not guarantee the authenticity or veracity of the data from rural Nigeria for the "vision document". His committee therefore had to contract the UNDP to handle the gathering of the data from rural areas (Eminue, 2005).

Over-Ambitious Policy Goals: Nigeria tends to over indulged in over ambitious policies either owing to the desire to establish support base and legitimacy for government to bring about economic development or to serve ideological ends.

Such policies cannot work as they will lack adequate financial, manpower, technical resources, institutional and organizational capabilities and the necessary political will for implementing such fundamental policies (Eminue, 2005).

Policy Instability*:* Regimes and policies change rapidly in Nigeria. Each regime usually come with its own policy. Leaders tend to throw overboard the policy of their predecessors-in-office. Policy instability in Nigeria adversely affects policy implementation. It is observed that erratic policies are dysfunctional to growth while policy stability tends to promote and engender planning as well as proper and effective implementation. For example, SAP was implemented in Babangida's tenure, but abandoned for Guided Deregulation in Abacha's regime. There must be continuity for stability to take effect (Eminue, 2005).

Compromise and Conflict during Implementation: In Nigeria most of the times compromise that seek to altar basic policy goals are made during implementation which is detrimental to successful execution of programmes. During the second Republic Shehu Shagari's low cost housing policy failed because of the conflict between the Federal Government and the other units as to who should execute the project at what level. Most of the times, policies are determined on the basis of political loyalty. In some cases they are used for political handshake. In Nigeria, no matter how sound a policy is, it cannot be implemented in a political vacuum. In the first republic, the establishment of a Steel Rolling Mill was shelved on political grounds. This led to a split for Aladja for the South and Ajaokuta for the North. This could not ensure the expected result (Eminue, 2005). It is most pathetic that in the Nigerian situation, policies that see the light of the day are policies that favour the insignificant few that govern. Any policy that is geared towards supporting the improved standard of living of the majority who are governed faces serious controversies and compromise.

Corruption: It must be noted that corruption goes with power and therefore, must be located first within the ranks of the powerful (Egonmwan, 1991). Since independence, corruption has been a major source of cost escalation of government projects. Government contracts in Nigeria have always been a conduit pipe for making fast and easy money by government officials and contractors through dubious means. Transparent processes are never followed in the award of (Multi-million naira) contracts. As Chief Olusegun Obasanjo comments on Aluminum Smelter Company of Nigeria (ALSCON) in Ikot Abasi in Akwa Ibom State in May 1999:

> *ALSCON was a very good project that was very badly executed. Already, we have spent well over US $2.3billion on the project before it got stopped (in May 1999). There was massive corruption and part of the money we have now got frozen (overseas) is about $600 million which was discovered. I hope, one day, we will get that money back home* (Eminue 2005 in the Guardian).

This is most typical of corruption profile in most mega-projects in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been observed that policy implementation is a very tedious process that requires a careful and critical analysis before it is embarked upon. It is a process of converting human and materials inputs, including information, technical, human, demands and support into outputs in the form of goods and services. Therefore a critical evaluation of all the elements of impending policy should be studied for proper implementation. The political and administrative factors affecting implementation arena have been x-rayed and discussed in this work. There is the need for a capable policy leadership to convert inputs-goods and services capable of initiating implementation process.

The common problem confronting implementation in Nigeria has been highlighted in this study. Appropriate critical decision must be taken about goal definition, implementation strategy and resources allocation by the decision maker otherwise implementation would always run into a hitch. Real reform requires systematic policy initiative, therefore inconsistent and unsustainable policies which constitute the major causes of implementation hemorrhage should be avoided. The linkage between policy formulation and implementation must be appreciated if we must succeed. The greater part of the problem is corruption which contributes to poor governance, socio-political and economic problems in Nigeria. Adequate machinery should be put in place by the government to address the inadequacies of previous policy implementation strategies if the Transformation Agenda must succeed.Finally, there should be an inter-marriage between policy formulation, evaluation and implementing if we must reap the fruits of the transformation Agenda.

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