

Public Policy Failures in Nigeria: Pathway to Underdevelopment

Samson E. Obamwonyi
Faculty of Law, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
E-mail: samsonobamwonyi@yahoo.com

Stanley Aibieyi, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Institute of Public Administration and Extension Services
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
E-mail: saibieyi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper discusses public policy failures in Nigeria and the reasons why governments formulate policies, among which is to find solutions to people's problems. The paper discussed briefly three schools of thought on public policies, that is, the orthodox or neo-classical, radical, and growth-with-equity. It also enumerated some of the public policies that have failed in the country since 1976 and examined the reasons for their failures. The historical and content analysis method was adopted for the paper. The paper reveals, among other reasons, that regime change and poor funding of policies and clarity of purpose are partly responsible for policy failures in Nigeria. The implications of public policy failures to the citizens in particular and the country in general were stated, some of which are waste of scarce resources, less patriotism among the populace, and de-motivation of citizens. In order to avoid policy failures in future, the paper recommends that there should be continuity in policy implementation even where there is regime change as government is a continuum; and parochial and primordial interests should be avoided during policy formulation and implementation in the country.

Key words: public, policy, failures, development, pathway, underdevelopment

Introduction

Public policies are part of the routes which governments in modern nations, both developed and developing, use in the attainment of many goals thereby achieving the much needed progress and advancement of their citizens in particular, and communities, towns, and countries in general. Public policies, which are the aggregate product of decisions, often times, are aimed at executing and implementing plans whether short or long term, to refocus the direction of the generality of a particular society of nation.

However, in Nigeria, public policies most often, are either meant to fail from the beginning or failed midway for so many reasons. Public policy failures in Nigeria have left the country to become one of the underdeveloped countries of the world. This is in spite of her enormous material resources at her disposal to become a great and prosperous nation. For quite some time, so many policies and programmes, enunciated by the federal government, failed to achieve the desired objectives. Some of the policies meant to be implemented with other levels of government – state and local governments – equally failed to achieve their objectives. Many times, the policies and programmes are either never executed half way or are jettisoned due to 'inbuilt failure' or by sheer deliberate failure. As a result, the citizens and the entire country suffer from the policy failures to the detriment of the general development of the country.

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

A policy is a response to the problems of people and society. According to Simmons (1974), a policy is "an intention, a guide to action, encompassing values which set priority and relations". Friedrich (1975) defined a 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." Ikelegbe (2006), opined that a policy is "a course of action or a programme of actions, which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems". According to Wikipedia (2011), "a policy is a principle or rule to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome." A policy may be referred to as the process of making relevant institutional and organisations decisions which include the identification of different alternatives such as programmes or priorities on expenditures, and making choices among them based on the impact they will have. Policies, to Jiboye (2011), can be likened to or understood as political, managerial, financial, and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach explicit goals and targets. A policy is a response to problems of people and the general society or a country. A policy problem is a human need, deprivation, or dissatisfaction, self identified or identified by others for which a relief is sought (Egonmwan, 2000).

Policies made or enunciated by government are public policies. "Public policies are those developed by governmental bodies and officials". Public policies are meant to solve people's problems. This may be referred

to as a policy problem. “A policy problem is a situation which many people consider adverse or intolerable in its effect on a large number of people over a long period of time. Therefore, people consider such situation to need a constructive change” (Egonmwan, 2000). According to David, (1964), a policy problem is “a human need, deprivation, or dissatisfaction, self identified or identified by others for which relief is sought”. In order for a situation or social situation to become a public policy problem, some of the following conditions must apply or occur:

- (a) A large number of people are in unfortunate conditions, suffer deprivation, are dissatisfied with an undesirable situation.
- (b) These adverse conditions are recognized by many people.
- (c) In addition to those who suffer the unsatisfactory situation, the decision makers are aware of the situation as they have responsibilities for coping with it.
- (d) People outside the immediate social problem (i.e. third parties) must show concern.
- (e) A large number of people think something must be done about the situation apart from merely recognizing the undesirable situation (Egonmwan, 2000).

Reasons for Public Policies

Public policies are made by governments in relation to the actions they (governments) want to take in order to enable it accomplish their objectives or address a particular problem or problems. All policies, whether private or public, are purpose-driven. They are meant to achieve a goal. The purposes or actions why governments make policies, according to Almond, Powell, Strom, and Dalton (2004), are:

- (i) to extract resources like money, goods, persons, and services from both domestic and international environments.
- (ii) To distribute money, goods, and services.
- (iii) To regulate human behaviour, that is, by the use of compulsion and inducement to enforce extractive and distributive compliance or otherwise bring about desired behaviour.
- (iv) For symbolic purpose, that is, the exhortation of citizens to desired form of behavior and often times to build a sense of community and common identity or to celebrate exemplary character.

In developing countries like Nigeria, the citizens are more concerned with the distributive policies because this is the policy aspect that will impact meaningfully in their lives. It is also the aspect which can improve on their lives thereby giving them the enabling environment and ability to contribute to the wellbeing of the country. However, the failure of public policies in Nigeria is partly responsible for the failure of the citizens to contribute meaningfully to the progress of the country because policy failures de-motivate the citizens and propel them to be less patriotic.

Factors Responsible for Policy Formulation

Many factors are responsible for formulation of public policies in societies and countries. As a result, Nigeria is not an exception. Sharma, Sandana, and Kaur, (2012) identify six factors that are responsible for policy formulation:

1. **Internal Environment:** The environment comprises many institutions which include political, economic, and social. Others are religion, ethics, law, beliefs, traditions, and so forth. It is necessary to emphasise that policy makers are the products of their society and environment. They were already part of their environment and society before they become policy makers. They imbibe the social values, ethos and traditions before they came to hold public offices.
2. **External Environment:** Every nation-state is a member of the comity of nations and international community. Every country has to keep in view its security perception and policies of other states and its obligations to the international environment.
3. **Ideology:** this has played a remarkable part in policy formulation of states in the present world. Ideology influences the policies and actions of nation-states and governments. A nation’s ideology shapes the methodology and objectives it will adopt and pursue.
4. **Political leadership and personalities:** The leadership of government in power is a determining factor in policy formulation especially in Nigeria. Every administration, be it from the same political party, has its own vision and ideas which it wants to translate into action. For example, the late President Yar’adua had its seven point agenda; President Jonathan administration has its transformation agenda.
5. **Pressure groups, interest groups, and political parties** also influence public policies.
6. **The bureaucracy** also plays important role in policy making.

Public Policy as Instrument of Change and Development

Public policy, no doubt is a pathway to change and improvement on the lives of the people in a particular territory where the policies are made. Added to this, public policy as an instrument or tool of change

and development has been submerged in three contending paradigms. According to Ojo (1997), there is the orthodox or neo-classical school. This approach has been embraced by the Western countries. The orthodox school gives government a crucial but limited role in the development of the society. This school of thought is based on four basic rules. First, the means of production must either be controlled or owned by private individuals; second, there should exist markets for the free exchange of means of production as well as goods and services; third, capitalist firms must be in existence so as to put the means of production into use that will result in the production of goods and services; fourth, trade at all levels, be it local, national and international must be conducted freely without any restriction.

The radical school of thought stresses that its main public policy objective is the achievement of a relatively equal distribution of income and other benefits of the production process. The radical school also recognises international trade as a crucial component of the economy of any nation. It also emphasised as a factor in international political economy which explains the disparities in the wealth of nations and lack of progress in the less developed nations (Weaver and Jameson, 1981). The neo-colonial contradictions which are influenced by the local elites are also identified as a major factor of underdevelopment, thereby resulting in the adoption of public policies which are not in the interests of the general populace but demand much of the interest and values of the ruling elite (Dye, 1975).

The third school of thought is the Growth-With-Equity which extracted some of the elements of both the orthodox and radical schools to development, especially those that are believed to either produce economic growth, emphasise egalitarian values or assures that the benefits of growth are extended to those who need them most (Russett and Starr, 1985). The main thrust to the Growth-With-Equity school of thought is that public policy must reflect new efforts directed at improving the rural areas of the developing nations here the majority still live and contain large concentration of the poor. The major components of this school of thought are employment and income distribution; capital investment policy; basic needs, and agricultural development.

Public Policies that Failed in Nigeria

Since 1976, many public policies enunciated by successive Nigerian governments have not lived up to their expectations. Some failed few months after their enunciation, while other failed due to multiplicity of reasons. For their failures, most of these policies would have helped in the galvanisation of economic and social wellbeing of the citizens. Among the public policies which have failed in the country include the following:

1. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN): This policy was formulated in 1976. Its functions, amongst others were to provide sufficient food for all Nigerians; to facilitate agricultural credit from commercial banks to farmers. The policy was abandoned soon after the civilian administration of Shehu Shagari came on board in 1979.
2. Green Revolution: it was formulated in 1979 and used to replace the Operation Feed the Nation. This policy did not achieve the desired results due mainly to structural defects occasioned by political parochialism. It ended up as mere slogan or symbolic policy.
3. Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Cooperation: it was formulated in 1987. Its functions include the provision of insurance cover for businesses engaged in agricultural production. The policy objectives were merged with NICON in 2000. This policy did not see the light of day before and after it was merged with NICON. It was a policy designed to fail right from its formulation as it was never implemented.
4. National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA), formulated in 1989. Its functions included, amongst others,
 - a) to provide strategic public support for land development
 - b) to promote and support optimum utilization of the nation's land resources for the accelerated production of food and fibre
 - c) to encourage the evolution of economic size villages
 - d) to provide gainful income and employment opportunities for rural people
 - e) to address the special problem of the nation's rural majority etc.The policy was phased out and its functions performed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD). There is nothing to demonstrate that the policy has not failed.
5. Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank: formulated in 2000, its functions include the provision of credit for the production, processing and marketing of agricultural products.
6. Forestry Development Programme, formulated in the year 2000, the objectives include the provision of tree seedlings and other forestry development facilities to local community participants in the country's five ecological zones.
7. Roll Back Malaria, formulated in 2001, the policy was meant to eradicate harmful effect of malaria parasites.

8. National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), enunciated in 2004. This policy evolved from the stand point of Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations to address human development problems. It was also on the basis of Nigeria's long-term goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation, elimination of corruption, good governance and value-orientation. All the efforts and purported machineries put into this policy were wasted as was a mere symbolic policy. It never functioned at any of the three levels of government meant to implement it.
9. Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure: This policy was enunciated in 1986 for the following purposes:
 - a) To coordinate and streamline all rural development activities in the country and to accelerate the pace of integrated rural development.
 - b) To promote a framework for grassroots social mobilization
 - c) To mount a virile programme of development, monitoring and performance evaluation
 - d) To provide rural areas with access roads and potable water
 - e) To improve rural sanitation, literacy and technology.The policy was targeted at the rural areas. It was to make rural areas more attractive to live in so as to stem migration to urban areas. It was also to change for better, the rural ways of life and modes of production in order to meet the challenges of increased agricultural and industrial production. The functions were absorbed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.
10. National Directorate of Employment: This policy was enunciated in 1986 for the following purposes:
 - a) To provide vocational skills development programme to secondary school leavers and graduates from tertiary institutions.
 - b) Special public works programme.
 - c) Small-scale Enterprises programme.
 - d) Agricultural Employment programmeThe policy was targeted at the youths in particular so as to provide skill for the unskilled; that to enable the youths acquire vocation. The policy, though still ongoing, is almost in comatose as it is not addressing youth employment and vocational skills. It is not doing enough to stem unemployment and enhance skill acquisition among youths. Many youths are not aware of the policy so as to key into it.
11. Better Life for Rural Women: It was enunciated in 1987 to improve the living conditions of rural women in the country. However, it was later replaced with the Family support Programme which became comatose and failed woefully after the regime that enunciated it.
12. National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE): It was enunciated in 1989 to provide basic education for nomadic herdsmen and fishermen; train nomadic teachers; provide infrastructure for the nomadic schools. Additional programmes were targeted towards girl's education, women and children in exceptionally difficult circumstances, and adult literacy. The policy was targeted at the nomadic people, particularly those whose occupations are nomadic in nature. The programme was absorbed by the Universal Basic Education policy. But there are no signs that the policy is functioning as planned. This is because the herdsmen who are the real target of the policy are not getting the education they ought to have.
13. Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), enunciated in 1992, it was formulated to provide access to credit for micro entrepreneurs at the grassroots levels; encouragement of job creation, local raw materials utilization, and development of indigenous technology. It was targeted at cooperative societies and informal associations to enable Nigerians have access to credit. The policy has been phased out while the functions were absorbed by the National Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB).
14. Family Support Programme (FSP): It was meant to promote the welfare of women and children. It was mainly focused on the health needs of women and children. Like the FEAP, the policy has been phased out while the functions were absorbed by the National Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB). It is also a failed policy.
15. National Commission for Mass Literacy: it was meant to promote adult literacy in the country, especially adults who are illiterate. The policy ought to be absorbed by the UBE, but the policy has gone into oblivion as it has also failed.

Factors Responsible for Public Policy Failures in Nigeria

The above policies, some of which were meant to alleviate poverty in the country failed due largely to the following factors:

- (a) Those that were aimed at poverty alleviation were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty
- (b) All the policies lacked a clearly defined policy framework with no proper guidelines for poverty

- reduction, rather, were meant to enrich the pockets of political appointees and stooges.
- (c) All the policies suffered from political instability, political interference, policy and macro-economic dislocations
 - (d) They also lacked continuity as different regimes, both military and civilian, enunciated different policies.
 - (e) Poor governance leading to abandonment of projects.
 - (f) Lack of involvement of beneficiaries in project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation
 - (g) Ineffective targeting of real beneficiaries. This led to leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries or targets.
 - (h) Unwieldy scope of policies and programmes which resulted in resources being thinly allocated to projects.
 - (i) Overlapping of functions of the agencies/institutions which ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts.
 - (j) Lack of mechanisms in the various policies and programmes and projects to ensure sustainability.
 - (k) Poor human capital development and inadequate funding.

Implications of Policy Failures

No doubt, public policy failures have many consequences and implications for the country. As the consequences affect individual citizens, so it affects the generality of the country. The consequences of public policy failures include:

- (a) **Less Patriotism by Citizens:** Public policy failure can bring about less patriotism by citizens of a country. Many Nigerians have suffered from public policy failures which resulted in the non-improvement of their lives and wellbeing. Due to non implementation of policies which can impact meaningfully on their livelihood, they become poor or poorer. For example, various policies and programmes which would have improved the rural dwellers failed after the euphoria that greeted the policies.
- (b) **De-motivation of Citizens:** Many policies and programmes that would have encouraged and energise Nigerians to have the spirit to do more or improve on their economic and social activities failed. Policies like the Agricultural and Cooperative Bank which would have guaranteed credit and loans to farmers and agricultural businesses failed. The policy when it was reactivated were never meant for the poor and average Nigerians as the conditions or requirements to access credit were beyond the reach of the people except the well-to-do.
- (c) **Alienation:** The citizens feel that they are not part of the society as they feel ostracised by the leadership and government. This is because most of the policies, especially the poverty alleviation policies, that would have given the poor, low income group and the average citizens, sense of belonging failed and when they were sparsely implemented the policies never benefited many citizens. Hence they do not have sense of belonging in their own country. They will feel unpatriotic.
- (d) **Underdevelopment:** Holistically, the country is the worse for policy failures because the failure of public policies is an encouragement of underdevelopment. A country whose citizens are not developed cannot progress. A people that are developed can also develop their nation. Citizens that cannot feed themselves cannot work to improve their country. It is what the country gives to her citizens that the citizens give to their nation.
- (e) **Economic Growth and GDP:** The aggregate production of the people in a specific period in a particular geographical location call a nation makes the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). But where the majority of the citizens cannot pull together resources that can contribute to the collective growth of their country is a setback for the nation. Part of the reason for this is the failure of public policies that would have encouraged and motivated the people to higher performance economically and socially. For example, policies that would have enhanced agricultural output are some of the policies that failed.
- (f) **Non-improvement on Human Capital:** Public policies, beside solving the problems of the people, are also meant to improve on the human resources of the society. It is human capital that is the fulcrum and lever of nations. Public policy failures hinder the development and improvement of human capital.
- (g) **Waste of Resources:** Public policy failures are waste of human and materials resources that were put into it during and after enunciation. The entire process of public policies is no mean task. If the policies failed to achieve its desired results, then the colossal resources in both human and financial put into it from formulation to the implementation stages are waste. The resources could have been devoted to other areas which need more attention in the country. It is the people's resources or commonwealth that are used in making and implementing policies.

Conclusion

Public policy failures are hindrances to the progress of the country. Policies need to be properly formulated and must as well be properly monitored so as to avoid failures. This is because the failure of public policies, to a large extent, is a failure of government and governance. The people's welfare ought to be anchored on public policies in order to improve on their wellbeing. Wellbeing is one of the essences of human existence and the existence and purpose of government at all levels.

The failure of public policies speaks volumes of government, especially on the negative aspect. Proper care should be taken to avoid policy failures, else the government would never gain the trust of the people because government exist for the people. Policy Implementation is always the problem of the governments of the country.

Recommendations

In order to stem the failure of public policies in Nigeria, the following recommendations may suffice:

- (i) All governments or administrations in the country must ensure that there is continuity in policies and programmes. Regime change should never be allowed to affect public policies and programmes else it would be a barrier to improvement of the lives of the people. Government is a continuum.
- (ii) Adequate and proper structures and machineries should always be put in place to ensure proper implementation of policies in the country.
- (iii) Appropriate institutions and agencies should be put in place to implement policies.
- (iv) Policies must always be properly funded for successful implementation.
- (v) Parochial and primordial interests must be set aside when making and implementing policies in the country. This is one of the bane of policy failures in Nigeria.

References

- Almond, G.A., Powell, G.B. Jr., Strom, K., and Dalton, R. (2004): *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*, 8th Ed., India, Dorling Kindersley Publishers. P.130
- Anderson, J. (1997): *Public Policy Analysis*, USA, Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Dye, T. (1975): *Understanding Public Policy*, Engle Cliffs, New Jersey Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Egonmwan, J.A. (2000): *Public Policy Analysis – Concepts and Applications*, Benin City, Reysin publishers.
- Friedrich, C. J. (1975): *Political Decision Making, Public Policy and Planning* cited in
- Ikelegbe (2006): *Public Policy Analysis: Concepts, Issues and Cases*, Lagos, Imprint Services, p. 3.
- Ikelegbe, A.O. (2006): *Public Policy Analysis: Concepts, Issues and Cases*, Lagos, Imprint Services, P. 3.
- Jiboye, A.D. (2011): "Achieving Sustainable Housing Development in Nigeria: A Critical Challenge to Governance", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (9), in Ighodaro, C.A. (2011): "Rethinking Housing Policies and Programmes in Nigeria", *Planning and the Transformation of the Nigerian Economy*, Ibadan, The Nigerian Economic Society, 2011 Annual Conference, p. 511.
- Phillips, A.O. and Titilola, S.T. (1997), cited in *Nigeria in 2010*, Ibadan, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), p. 133
- Russett, B. and Starr, H. (1985): *World Politics: The Men for Choice*, New York, W.H. Freeman, in Ojo, S.O.J. (1997): "Public Policy, Society and Development", Bello-Imam, I.B. (ed.): *Governance in Nigeria: Economy, Politics, and Society in the Adjustment Years 1985 – 1995*, Ibadan Stirling- Horden Ltd., p. 223.
- Sharma, M. P., Sandana, B.L., and Kaur, H. (2012): *Public Administration in Theory and Practice*, 48th edition, India, Kitab Maha Publishers, p.640.
- Simmons, R. (1974): *Policy flow Analysis* Western Political Quarterly, cited in Ikelegbe,
- A.O. (2006) *Public Policy Analysis: Concepts, Issues and Cases*. Lagos, Imprint Services, p.3
- Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2011): "Policy", 6 April, 2011, in Ighodaro, C.A. (2011): "Rethinking Housing Policies and Programmes in Nigeria", *Planning and the Transformation of the Nigerian Economy*, Ibadan, The Nigerian Economic Society, 2011 Annual Conference, p. 511.
- Weaver, J. and Jameson, K. (1981): *Economic Development: Competing Paradigms*, Washington, D.C., University Press of America, in Ojo, S.O.J. (1997): "Public Policy, Society and Development" , Bello-Imam, I.B. (ed.): *Governance in Nigeria: Economy, Politics, and Society in the Adjustment Years 1985 – 1995*, Ibadan, Stirling- Horden Ltd., p. 223.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

