

Public Policy Analysis and Information Utilization by Political Actors towards Smooth Governance in 21st Century: Nigeria Experience

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Abstract

This paper examined the act of public policy making in Nigeria vis-a-vis the political actors involved. Public policy was viewed as one of the necessary tool of governance, provided its formulation, implementation and evaluation are carefully been handled by those at the helms of affairs. It was however discovered that public policy making in Nigeria is hindered by a lot of factors which include lack of feedback mechanism to measure effectiveness of such policies. Government instability as well as non acceptance of expert opinion among others was also discovered to militate against effective policy making in the country. Recommendations were thereafter offered to the political actors on how to ensure smooth governance in the 21st century.

Introduction

There is no doubt, Nigeria is one of the most populous black nation of the world with equal proportion of both literates and non-literates populace. Just like in every other country, a nation does not live in isolation of leaders. Except that such leaders are expected to be God fearing, upright and those with the love of their country at heart. This is to ensure that good policies and governance that benefits all and sundry are enshrined in running the state's affairs.

Policy making and good governance can be likened to two sides of a coin, with each trying to complement the other. Thus, when right leaders are in place, the possibility of having good policies will be high and this subsequently transform into good governance which prompted Akanbi (2006) to say:

“Promotion of transparency and good governance is a task that has to be done by all and sundry. The leadership and the followership must be totally committed in bringing about changes in attitude and orientation, the sort of change that is manifestly seen to be transparent and honest. The leaders must lead by example and must be seen to be above board in the conduct of their persona/ and official duties”

Governance therefore could said to be the act or process of decision making as well as the process of its implementations. To wikipedia.org, governance has to do with the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage society's problems and affairs. In order words, governance is the use of institutions, structures of authority and even collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy.

Public policy on the other hand was viewed by Kilpatrick (2000) as a system of laws, regulatory measures, course of action and funding priorities concerning a given topic promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives. Wayne (2009) on his part described public policy as purposive and consistent course of action produced as a response to a perceived problem of a constituency, formulated by a specific political process and adopted, implemented and enforced by a public agency.

One important thing that need to be noted is that, public policy had unanimously been viewed as overall framework within which the actions of the government are undertaken to achieve its goals or a devised course of action in response to a perceived problem within any given setting. It can however be on any aspect of human endeavours i.e. education, health, social welfare, crime etc.

Under an ideal government circle, there is need for what is called 'policy agenda' which is a list of issues that need to be acted upon by decision makers/political actors. Sadly, strict adherence to this norm is not the practice in Nigeria and this might not be unconnected with what Babawale (1996) captured thus:

"Unfortunately, following the period of programmed and manipulated decolonization, power was handed over to an elite whose fidelity to the capitalist path of development was not in doubt. This ruling Class was at best comprador in nature, playing the role of the middle man, without any root in productive activities. They were satisfied with being mere

agents of international capitalism. The Nigeria post-colonial state was thus characterized by structural imperfections such as a mono-cultural economy, a weak and productive but comprador bourgeoisie. These characteristics became endemic causes of instability as the state which presides over the allocation of values becomes an arena of class struggle and inter-elite conflicts”

Even though the above submission is germane to good governance or egalitarian society, it should be noted that all the expected activities cannot be carry out in isolation of the populace over which the political actors want to govern. To achieve this successfully therefore, proper channel of communication that pave way for proper information dissemination as well as feedback mechanism must be put in place as access to information constitutes an important aspect of human existence.

Information according to Igbeka and Atinmo (2002) is an important tool and a valuable resource required for the realization of any objective or goal set. In the view of Popoola (2007) information is very useful in decision making and its availability enables individuals, groups or organization to make rational decisions and reduce their level of uncertainty. As such, sharing formation between the government and the govern in terms of its accessibility and feedback is highly inevitable in good governance.

With the pervasive bad governance prevailing in Nigeria, which has hitherto led to wrong and selfish policy formulation, it is desirable to devise a blue print through which the political gladiators can assess their performance via information feedback mechanism from the populace as regards to their action(s) /inaction(s).

Governance in Nigeria since 1914

Nigeria right from inception in 1914, has experienced series of transition which ranges from one form of government to the other. This forms of government includes colonial, military and democratic rule.

Immediately after the country's independence in 1960, the first democratic government was put in place but unfortunately, the life span of the then democratic rule was cut short by a military coup detat in 1966 with another counter coup in 1967 which eventually led to the country's civil war between 1967-1970. Thereafter, the military continued with the nation governance until 1979 when a political transition put in place, ushered in the second republic (democratic rule) before it was cut short in 1983 by yet another military coup which was also sent packing by 1985 coup plot, hence, the country remained under the military till 1993 when the then junta annulled an election believed to be free and fair, devoid of ethnic coloration in the history of the country.

In response to public disturbance that followed the election annulment, an interim national government was put in place. Unfortunately, the arrangement only lasted for about three months before another military junta overthrown the government. The junta remained in office until 1998 when divine providence cut short it's leadership which ushered in yet another military ruler who successfully conducted a political transition that ushered in a democratic governance in 1999. As such, 1999 till date in the history of Nigeria could be described as a period of uninterrupted democratic governance in the country.

Examples of past/present policies enacted in Nigeria.

The underlisted policies are examples of formulated policies in Nigeria which are either partially or haphazardly implemented without positive result(s) to the target population.

- ❖ Operation Feed the Nation
- ❖ Austerity Measure
- ❖ War Against indiscipline (WAI)
- ❖ Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)
- ❖ Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF)
- ❖ National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP)
- ❖ Subsidy Re-investment Programme (SURE-P)
- ❖ Central Bank of Nigeria Policy on Bureau de Change Operations
- ❖ Central Bank of Nigeria Policy on International Money Transfer
- ❖ Nigeria Auto Policy

These different policies as listed above are lofty enough to improve both political and economy situation of a country. However, Ayo (2014) had observed that government failed in the developing world because of poor leadership which according to him set laudable visions in the past, but later led to grave disappointments. Leaders of developing world he believes are not committed to their set vision but rather embarked on colossal waste of time and resources that usually resulted into a state of anarchy.

Failure of set policies in Nigeria therefore, may not be unconnected with inability of successive regimes in the country to carefully implement and evaluates the proposed policies. This is because information derived from the targeted population at this stage, go a long way to determine how the populace perceived the formulated policy and this gives the political actors an opportunity of making amendments where necessary to suit the purpose for which the policy is been formulated.

Characteristics of Good Governance

- ❖ Openness in government transactions
- ❖ Making of rational decisions by government
- ❖ Transparency in governmental procedures
- ❖ Respect for the rule of law I
- ❖ Free flow of information
- ❖ Accountability of government official
- ❖ Freedom of the press

Features of Public Policy

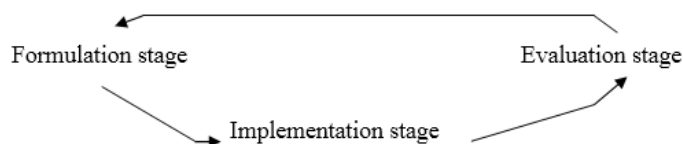
- ❖ It is rational in the sense that, it is a concessions efforts at achieving a right decision.
- ❖ Public policy has legal obligation since it is based on law. Hence, that made it legitimate
- ❖ It is bounded over the entire citizens or people within the area of jurisdiction of such policy initiator(s)
- ❖ Public policy has a monopoly of coercion because it has the legitimate backing of the means of tackling violence i.e. police, army, prison etc.

Stages of Public Policy

There are three stages namely:

- (i) Formulation stage
- (ii) Implementation stage
- (iii) Evaluation state.

This refers to the processes and steps that public policy goes through



Formulation stage

This is the early stage of goal definition or setting. Therefore, to set a goal or accurate public policy, the decision makers have to identify what is the issue at hand, are there alternative solution(s) to the problem, selecting the best alternatives among the various alternatives available while considering the ability of the chosen alternatives to solve the problem at hand.

Implementation stage

This is the stage meant for the execution or administration of the formulated policy. The stage equally involves an interaction between goal setting and the action geared towards achieving the goal. To this end, certain pressure groups may try to lobby for the modification or even abandonment of new policy that is about to be implemented.

Policy many at times failed to achieved the desired goal especially in third world countries whenever it is been poorly implemented. This does happened in third world countries of which Nigeria is a part. To this end, there seems to be widening gap between policy goals and actualization of such plans.

Evaluation stage

At this stage, political actors are expected to estimate, assess, appraise an implemented policy in terms of content, implementation and effect. On the basis of this therefore, the cost benefit analysis as well as cost effectiveness analysis are both expected to be examined by policy makers at this stage.

Recently Enacted Government Policy

In November, 2013, the Federal Government raised the duty and levy payable on imported new and used cars from 20% to 70%. The policy according to government was aimed at encouraging local production of new vehicles with 0% placed on the completely knocked down units of the local assembly plants. With the implementation of the policy, there are agitations and strong appeals from Nigerians to ensure its reversal. Paramount among these appeals is "The Nation" News paper editorials which laments that "the new tariffs on used and new imported vehicles without fixing infrastructure will hurt our economy". As such, they appealed to the Federal Government to halt the move pending when Nigerians will be mobilised to approve the move as well as put support lines in place before attempting to impose undue hardship on already sapped people in a country where poverty continues to range the land.

Furthermore, many Nigerians have continued to call on the Federal Government on need to formulate certain policies they felt will be beneficial either to their individual institutions or the nation at large. In connection with this, the acting governor of Nigerian Apex Bank (Central Bank of Nigerian) Alade (2014) in a recent public statement advised the government to bring up policies that will act as complimentary reforms to address the issue of inequality, corruption, unemployment and insecurity in the country.

Also appealing to government on policies that have direct bearing on agricultural sector, with the view of achieving a more sustainable agricultural sector in the country, Adeokun (2014) sought for the involvement of

farmers in the process of policy formulation and implementation, so that the end result will be relevant to farmers' situation, socially, culturally and economically.

In government circle however, there is what they call policy agenda which is a list of issues that need to be acted upon by decision makers or the political actors. This is because for any issue to be listed out, it must be as a result of crisis/protest activity within a nation, agitation by the media or out of genuine concern/selfish interest of the political leaders.

Factors Militating Against Government Policies in Nigeria

- ❖ Lack of adequate feedback mechanism necessary to measure effectiveness or otherwise of government policy through evaluation.
- ❖ Public Policy in Nigeria and other third world countries are dominated by bureaucrats.
- ❖ Non Acceptance of expert opinion
- ❖ Planning indiscipline as Nigeria political actors doesn't stick to their plan.
- ❖ A lot of compromise do go into play in policy formulation in the country
- ❖ Government instability as a result of incessant change of government which often leads to lack of continuity.
- ❖ Corruption which is the bane of many problem in this country is another factor, as resources meant for a particular policy, get stocked in the hands of few powerful people. .
- ❖ Unacceptability of a particular policy by the populace which most often resulted into political crisis.

Recommendations

- ❖ Government of political actors must be able to effectively manage the political & economic affairs of a country where they govern in such a way that success will be recorded at the end.
- ❖ The Political actors must learn to give equity and fairness to all.
- ❖ Must be responsive and accountable to the populace.
- ❖ He who must come to equality must come with clean hand goes a popular saying. In views of this, those at the helms of affairs, must govern via rule of law
- ❖ Objective weighing of information relating to the available policy alternatives before making such policies public.

Conclusion

World over, there is no alternative to good governance as leadership connotes accomplishing a purpose by rallying the support and cooperation of others. Hence, information service delivery need to be given serious attention, if any government policies must succeed as it is the source of enlightenment for all and sundry.

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