

Problems and Challenges of Policy Implementation for National Development

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Abstract

As policies and programmes continue to fail in Nigeria, public confidence in government ability to achieve national development erodes. Analysis in public policy implementation continually assumes a greater significance. Public policy is not a bed of roses; it is often challenging and creative, many proposals faced obstacles on their way to implementation. Most proposals do not survive and those that do, emerged mutilated or distorted, so that they no longer serves their intended purposes. The objectives of the paper are to examine the problems and challenges of policy implementation in Nigeria. The paper relies on secondary data for its presentation and analysis. It is of the view that effective policy implementation can only be achieved not only through a continuous political commitment and clear definition of responsibilities and coordination, but also through genuine commitment to eradication of corruption at all levels of government.

Introduction

Public policy implementation has been described as the major problem confronting Nigeria in its effort to achieve national development. Implementation often turn out to be the graveyard of many policies. From experience, little attention is paid to the subject of policy implementation by policy makers. It is often taken for granted that once a policy is adopted by government, it must be implemented and the desired goals achieved. And in most cases little or no attention is paid to the problems and complexities associated with execution of policies. Large amount of energy and resources are spent on designing and preparing plans for all kinds with little or no thought given to the complex chains of reciprocal interactions and variables required and this can be seen usually in the widening gap between intentions and results.

The situation of public policy implementation in Nigeria is best described by George Honadle and Rudi Klauss, (cited from Egonmwan, 2009)

"Implementation is the nemesis of designers, it conjures up images of plans gone awry and of social carpenters and masons who fail to build to specifications and thereby distort the beautiful blue prints for progress which were handed to them. It provokes memories of good ideas that did not work and places the blame on the second (and Second Class) member of the administration team"

This is a typical situation in Nigeria, where the intention of designers of Policies are often underline by constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration coupled with prevalence of high level corruption. The resulting short-comings, difficulties and failures that have attended major policies in developing countries have help to direct attention to the need for planning explicitly, management of policy implementation in which adequate attention is paid to such factors as political variable and institutional capacity to execute and operate development projects. It also led to the emergence of theories and models particularly during the period of the United Nations second development plan decade in 1970, when emphasis shifted from plan formulation to plan feasibility. These theoretical constructs have been designed to help policy makers, especially toward better understanding of the problems of policy implementation. (Egonmwan 2009)

The Concept of Public Policy

It is sensible to begin our discussion of implementation with analysis of how public policy is perceived and understood. Many scholars regard policy implementation as a separate activity which takes place after policy has been formulated. Although this view is held because there is little appreciation of the fact that building support for policies is an integral part of designing them. This widely held view on separation of policy design from implementation has been attacked by scholars like Pressenca and Wildavsky (1973) as fatal from any sense of direction. They argued that "the separation of policy formulation from implementation is fatal. It is not better than mindless implementation without a sense of direction, though we can isolate policy formulation and policy implementation for a separate discussion" (cited in Egonmwan 2009). However, a number of implementation scholars make a conceptual distinction between policy formulation- and policy implementation. Example Sabatier (1986), Sabatier and Mazmanian (1983). Chronologically, implementation is though to occur after the adoption of a policy.

There are various ways in which the word "policy" is used. Many definitions of public policy abound and may simply be futile trying to discover which is correct or proper. Henri (2006) traced back public policy to 4000 years to the Babylon city of Ur and defined it "as a course of action adopted and pursued by government towards accomplishment of objectives". Other definitions associated public policy with purposive behavior. In this regard, Anifowose & Enemuoh (2005) defined it as "purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern". They further stressed that, at a broader level, it is concerned with the relationship of the government units to its environment. On the other hand, Dye (1972) simply defined public policy as "whatever government choose to do or not to do", though, he was criticized for not taking cognizance of the gap between what government wants to do and what they actually do. However, what makes public policies distinctive is that they are developed by governmental bodies and officials who possess the authority to make decisions that are accepted as binding, so long they act within the limits of their roles.

Basu (2006) has identified certain basic elements that distinguish public policy from other policies; as follows:

- i. Purposive or result oriented action rather than random behaviour is the hallmark of public policy.
- ii. Public policy refers to the action or decisional pattern by public administrators on a particular issue over a period rather than their separate discrete decisions on that matter in adhoc fashion.
- iii. Policy is what government actually do and what subsequently happens rather than what they intend to do or say.
- iv. Public policy may be either positive or negative in form positively, it may involve some form of government action regarding any issue or problem, negatively, it may involve a decision by government officials not to take action on a matter on which government opinion, attitude or action is asked for.
- v. Public policy is based on law is authoritative. It has legal sanction behind it, which is potentially coercive in nature and is binding on all citizens.

As a course, of action public policy involves a number of activities that are carried out sequentially or processually in distinct stages as follows:

- a. Goal formulation involving multiple groups with varying and often conflicting objectives,
- b. Problem identification and definition as a result of partial ignorance or problem situation.
- c. Agenda setting involving attempts by individuals and groups to influence policy decisions.
- d. Seeking of policy alternatives and evaluating such policy alternatives, that is analysis of policy options and policy choice.
- e. Policy execution by administrators after formal adoption i.e policy implementation.
- f. Policy evaluation that is concern with estimation, assessment or appraisal of policy.

Implementation: Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

A concern with implementation emerged as an outgrowth of the renewed interest in the substance of policy among post behavioural era. Political scientist and scholars such as Repley (1985) Austin Rannley (1968) and Sharkansky (1970) argues that it become imperative and legitimate for political scientist to relate policy content to characteristics of the policy making process. They emphasize that government performance can only be improve through study and analysis of implementation. According to Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) "By concentrating on the implementation of programs, as well as their initiation, we should be able to increase the probability that policy promises will be realized".

Public policy implementation has been described as one of the major problem confronting developing countries. Egonmwan (2009) argues that "relativity, the successful implementation of public policy is difficult in first world countries; it is more difficult in the third world, and may be most difficult in reform oriented governments in the third world such as Africa and Latin America and most usually it is the problem of widening gap between intentions and result". Weimer and Vinning (1992) buttress this point, by drawing the analogy between implementation and marriage, "that if policy adoption is courtship, then implementation is marriage. Courtship is a sort of coalition building in which the couple maneuvered to gain the support of their parents, they often must seek the support of their own children from previous marriages. Not all courtships are successful, however, with the wedding, begins implementation of the wedding agreements. The couple must constantly work to keep the marriage healthy in ever changing environment. At some point, they may become so accommodated to each other that the marriage stays healthy with little conscious effort. Perhaps achieving this latter condition, though not always permanent, represents the closest we can come to declaring a successful implementation".

Implementation scholars exhibit wide differences on a number of crucial issues. Where implementation starts or end is not settled. While implementation is commonly referred to a stage, boundaries are not clear. Authors vary in their selection of critical factors affecting implementation. Criteria for evaluating implementation success are conflicting. Moreover, the simplest, most straight forward path for implementation

has proven to be difficult.

Public policy implementation involves translating policy objectives into concrete reality. When all the laws required to give effect to policies adopted have been put in place. The next logical stage is the actual implementation of policy. Implementation refers to the process of converting inputs financial, information, materials, technical, human, demand and support etc, into outputs -goods and services" (Egonmwan, 2009). It is the stage that the earlier preparations, plans and designs are concretized. Brown and Wildavsky (1984) view implementation "as a process of mutual adaptation in which policies and programmes adapt to their environment and each alter the other". This suggests that implementation is a place in the life cycle of policy and indeed the most crucial of all the other phases.

A number of implementation scholars make a conceptual distinction between policy formulation and policy implementation, which for them means carrying out prior decision chronologically. Separating policy from administration and the function of legislative bodies and administrative agencies are deeply entrenched American values related to popular accountability and limited bureaucratic discretion. And it appeals to democratic instincts to mark the start of implementation following the completion of policy making. Although this view of policy administration dichotomy has been severely criticized by scholars like Jeffery Pressman and "Widdavsky. The analysis of implementation needs to be broad enough to include policy formulation and impacts in order to be realistic and useful,

Factors That Affect Implementation

Among the most important contributions of the implementation literature has been to heighten sensitivity to the numbers of factors that may adversely affect implementation. Many discoveries of factors affecting implementation were not really new, but reformulations of public administration insights concerning bureaucratic behavior and relations. The principal distinguishing feature of implementation analysis was the overarching concern with policy consequences rather than structure or processes.

Many scholars have identified factors that are significant in the analysis of policy implementation. Example Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) identified factors such as the characteristics of implementing agencies, predisposition of implementers and resources as critical. Miolbrey McLaughlin (1978) emphasized the amount of interest, commitment and support evidenced by principal actors had a major influence on the prospect for success. However, there is a good deal of controversy in the implementation literature over which factors are most important in determining implementation success or failure.

Lynn and Wildavsky (1992) further suggested that the challenge presented to implementers depends very much on the problems passed along to them by policy formulators, success in implementing must be evaluated within the context of particular problems, and critical factors affecting implementation will vary with what is being attempted.

As implementation studies have multiplied, the list of variables affecting them have gotten longer. The most comprehensive treatment can be found in the work of Egonmwan (2009), who identified the following factors.

Content of Policy

The implementation of a programme is influenced by the interest affecting the content of a programme to the extent that policy implementation seeks to introduce changes in social, political and economic relationships. Those whose interests are threatened by such policy are bound to oppose it. And those who stand to gain are bound to press for such policy. Sometimes, this generates conflict and competition and may make implementation more difficult.

Policy implementation is also affected by the degree of behavioral change programme envisages, for its intended beneficiaries. Programmes that are designed to achieve long range objectives may be more difficult to implement than those whose advantages are immediately apparent to the beneficiaries.

Programme Implementors

The more active, the expert and personnel possessed by the implementing agency, the greater the support of the political elites received by such agency and the greater access to resources it has, the more it is likely that such agency can implement programmes successfully. The executive

The Context of Policy

Implementation of public policy involves various actors at various levels, each having a particular interest in the programme. Thus the power base and strategies of actors involved in implementation can influence the course of implementation. The characteristics of the various institutions and regimes as well as the compliance culture of the people equally influence the implementation process and response of the people.

Environment

Environmental factors can influence or be influenced by the policy implementation. Environmental factors can be thought of as a sort of constraining corridor through which the implementation or policy must be forced. Different policies are implemented in differing cultural, social, political and economic conditions.

Problems of Policy Implementation in Nigeria

It is important to note that the bane of Nigeria's national development lies in its inability to implement policies effectively, despite the enormous resources at the disposal of the government. Many policies have suffered at the stage of implementation and hardly serve their intended purposes. Many scholars expressed their views on the problems of policy implementation in Nigeria. While some problems are structural, others are environmental and attitudinal. Some of the major problems are highlighted below:

i. Lack of Clear Definition of Goals;

Various governments in Nigeria have the obvious tendencies of pursuing multiple goals that in most cases are complicated. Policy goals often lack clarity and consistency with demands of the people. Policy makers in Nigeria assume that they know the needs of the target groups whose social situation they are attempting to ameliorate and therefore see no need for clarity of goals. And it is obvious where policy goals are not clear, implementation tend to be more difficult.

ii. Over Ambitious Policy Goals:

Many policies pursued by government tends to be over ambitious which largely affect how programmes and policy goals are decided. According to Egomwan (2009) "the desire to establish the legitimacy of the political regime by providing tangible evidence of improving conditions, create a situation in which the political leaders are likely espouse policies that led to improvement of conditions of life, but may be not .realizable because of its overambitious nature", Therefore, the scope, comprehensiveness and operability of policies formulated gave rise to serious bottlenecks during implementation. Vision 2020 & the present nine point agenda are some of such policies.

iii. Lack of Appropriate Technology for implementation

Implementing agencies in most cases lack appropriate modern technology, managerial skill and administrative capacity that are prerequisite for effective policy implementation, The procedures adopted in policy implementation are such that are not consistent with policy goals. And sometimes cultural consideration hampers adoption of modern technology in areas of programme implementation. Examples can be seen in the peoples resistance of use of fertilizer because of traditional beliefs some decades ago; or the rejection of polio vaccines in some northern states.

iv. Lack of Continuity Commitment to Policy

Change in government more often is accompanied by change in priorities. The situation tends to make implementation more difficult in terms of switch over to entirely different priorities and objectives which requires new organizations, personnel, resources and technology which are not always easy to provide. This led to abandonment of many policies.

v. Lack of Clear Definition of Responsibility & Coordination

Many policies in Nigeria require the involvement of many agencies at different levels of government. Example includes the policy on poverty reduction that was designed in phases and requires the involvement of so many agencies across the three level of government. And there is absence of coordination and clear definition of responsibility among the various agencies involved This factor led to the failure of the poverty alleviation policy.

vi. Comparison During Implementation

Compromises are made that usually undermines the basic policy goals are detrimental to successful execution of programmes. For example the successive Housing policies in Kano failed because it turnout to be the means of rewarding party loyalist and other economic and royal elites, thereby negating the basic goals of the policies of providing housing to the general public.

vii. Corruption:

The corrupt tendencies of public officials and politicians in connivance with private organizations and individuals have no doubt have a far reaching consequences on effective implementation of policies in the country. Corruption has pervaded every aspect of our societal life. It can be seen not only in inflation of contract figures or percentage negotiations, but outright diversion of billions of naira meant for one programme or another. Agencies like EFCC and ICPC created to control and convert corruption have turnout to be toothless bulldogs with nothing to show compared to the high level corruption in the country. These corrupt practices can easily be seen in the diversion of billions of US dollars aimed at providing enough power supply that will boost the national economy, a case which is yet to be investigated.

Challenges

Challenges associated with policy implementation depend largely on the problems passed on to the implemented

by policy formulators and those that are inherent within the implementation stage itself. In Nigeria, however, the most serious challenge is the ability of the government to eradicate corruption at all levels. Genuine commitment to the eradication of corruption involves not only the empowerment of the various agencies charged with responsibility of converting corruption with little interference by the government in their activities, but also the prosecution of the perpetrators no matter, their social, economic and political standing in the society.

Secondly, there is also the issue of including implementation plan and analysis within the broader policy formulation framework, where the chains and multiples factors for successful policy implementation will be considered and appropriate measures taken, that will provide for clear definition of goals and coordination as well as defined programme for achievement of goals.

More importantly, the ability of the politicians and bureaucrats to imbibe a culture of patriotism and the necessary political will and commitment, that will ensure continuity in policy direction and resistance to temptations and compromises that for long have been detrimental to the successful implementation of public policies.

Lastly, the challenge is to the various civil society organizations, other professional bodies and private individuals to pressurize the government for better public policy that will ensure the progress of the country, through the various constitutional means and other democratic norms and traditions.

The Effects of These Problems and Challenges On National Development

Given the ample problems and challenges elaborated earlier, the question of national development looks quite not obvious. National development been multi faceted phenomena, that is concerned with total transformation of the political economic, social and cultural aspects of the society, requires, commitment and structures conducive to implementation of development programmes. The impact of implementation of policies on any economy is of vital importance. "The greatest problem hindering development of less developed countries like Nigeria is a lack of implementation and or improper implementation of plans, programmes and projects". (Bernard N. Olewel1995) In recent times, there has been increasing pressures on the Nigerian government to provide basic essential services such as education, health infrastructures, etc which was resulted from growing number of population, coupled with high level of insecurity that engulfed most parts of the country. This is attributed to the high level of poverty and unemployment. And it is evident, that where policy goals are over ambitious, not well articulated and made explicit, implementation because more difficult and complicated, and it amounts to overstretching the available resources for maximum impact and at the end nothing concrete is achieved. Secondly, in the absence of Modern technology, managerial skills and administrative capacity in our public agencies responsible for implementing projects and programmes, the resultant effects will be inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the utilization of resources which lead to serious misappropriations and mismanagement. Thirdly, constant change in policies or shifts in priorities that led to abandonment of many projects across the country, largely due to change in government has the potential of making our national developments more difficult and led to compromises in our development plans. At the end, government may likely loose focus and direction, which will invariably affects our national development.

Lastly, national development will never be possible in the face of high level corruption that pervaded all nooks and crannies of the country. The situation was so bad to the extent that it caught the attentions of International organizations such as the World Bank and Transparency International, and Nigeria was ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world. It can be seen in the way billions of US dollars were squandered in NEPA (Now Power Holding Company of Nigeria) and NNPC in recent years, At some point, the transparency international is showing accusing finger at Aso Rock as been the most corrupt place in the country. And Nigerians are yet to recover from the recent oil subsidy saga that amount to trillions of naira and still nothing has been done to perpetrators. The effects of these corrupt practices will no doubt lead to lack of basic essentials like education, health, food and shelter, And poverty, unemployment, arm robbery, kidnapping, militancy and terrorism will be on the increase and the question of National development will be pipe dream.

Conclusion

Essentially, success in implementation must-be evaluated within the context of particular problems and critical factors affecting implementation varies, and "success prone" policies are not always obvious. Effective implementation is said to be partially preordained by good leadership that can be the significant political hidden hand that guides disorganized and desperate interest to converge in support of implementing policy. External monitoring of the implementation process was also a crucial variable. Constant and closer monitoring and intervention on continue basis can greatly facilitate action.

Effective and successful policy implementation is the key to national development, it is a building block that facilitate socio-economic and political progress and can only be achieved not only through a continuous political commitment and clear definition of responsibilities and coordination, but also through genuine commitment to eradication of corruption at all levels of government.

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