

Public Policy Implementation Issues and Perspectives in Nigeria

By

Imrana Ahmad

Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Studies
Islamic University in Uganda, Mbale, Uganda
Imranaahmad@iuiu.ac.ug
+2347087740000/+256755338007

Abstract

Public policy implementation globally bedeviled by numerous challenges ranging from corruption, lack of political will, maladministration, half-baked bureaucrats, unclear goals, lack of continuity commitment to policy, lack of clear definition and coordination, lack of appropriate machinery for policy implementation etcetera. In Africa specifically, the policy implementation appears to be on papers only. To some extent, the political actors will come up with a policy that is not viable. Therefore this paper was aimed to investigate the issues militating against policy implementation in Nigeria and proffer the solutions to those issues under investigations. The researcher relies on secondary data to attain the study's aims and objectives. The study identifies the following issues as to why public policies flop at the implementation stage include: corruption, lack of political will, pseudo bureaucrats, lack of conducive environment to implement the policies, lack of continuity, inadequate funding, maladministration among others. The study recommends that, political actors need to be proactive when it comes to policy implementation, government need to employ expert who have the technical know, agencies that is saddled with protection of public money need to checkmate the activities of political actors, the local community leaders need to be involve in the implementation process.

Keyword: Issues; Public; policy; perspectives;

Introduction

Government of all the time supposed to be a driven agent for the development of a country. Nigeria is not an exception it came out with so many policies/ initiatives geared toward the growth of the country, Alas, the vast majority of these policies flop (Amila et al, 2022). In 1960s and 1970s a different segment of study termed as 'Public Policy' was developed not because of the concerned of efficiency and effectiveness of policy formulation and implementation but rather, with 'how' policy making. Yehezkel Dror is the founder, in his effort to distinguish a different field of policy science. In his wide range of study, he highlighted some of the weakness and inadequacy of public policy

making in a modern society and emphasis should be put on the need for development of another discipline that is based on systematic knowledge. According to him, the need to develop a policy science is based on two reasons, first the inadequacy of the policy science to address the current challenge of demand of development and modernization. Secondly, an intellectual urgency for academia to apply the huge increasing knowledge to different discipline to enhance the quality of public policy implementation (Prabhu et al, 2012).

Public policy implementation remains a significant challenge across different governance contexts. Globally, classical theoretical frameworks such as the top-down and bottom-up models (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Lipsky, 1980) have been instrumental in explaining the disjunction between policy formulation and actual outcomes. These gaps often result from institutional incapacity, misaligned incentives, or corruption. Even in advanced democracies, large-scale infrastructure or social welfare policies can falter due to coordination breakdowns or elite capture (Grindle, 2017). For example, the United States' Affordable Care Act rollout faced notable setbacks due to technological and administrative deficiencies (KFF, 2013).

At the continental level, Africa's ambitious African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), ratified by over 49 countries by 2021, exemplifies the implementation gap. Despite the promise of economic integration, only about half of the ratifying countries—such as Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa—have made tangible progress in operationalizing trade under the agreement (UNECA, 2023). Key impediments include underdeveloped infrastructure, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and varying national regulatory frameworks (Reuters, 2022; African Union, 2021).

Within individual African countries, national policy innovations show mixed outcomes. In Nigeria, the Abiye Safe Motherhood Project in Ondo State significantly reduced maternal mortality through mobile technology and community health worker interventions. Recognized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a best practice (UNDP, 2014), it nonetheless faced challenges in scaling due to funding constraints, limited institutional support, and overdependence on political leadership

(World Bank, 2015; Olaniran et al., 2017). At the sub-national level, Nigeria provides a compelling case of how federal initiatives often struggle with implementation. The N-Power Programme, a youth employment initiative, has been critiqued for weak monitoring systems, funding delays, and limited synergy between federal and state agencies (NajoPS, 2022; BudgIT, 2021). Similarly, the Midwives Service Scheme (MSS)—a national policy to improve maternal and child health by deploying trained personnel to rural areas—has been hampered by irregular stipends, poor logistics, and sustainability issues (Novatia Consulting, 2022; Exploratio Journal, 2023). Regionally, policy outcomes are often undermined by design flaws and weak institutional ecosystems. The Presidential Mandate Housing Scheme, for instance, failed to meet its targets due to unclear objectives, funding gaps, and minimal private sector involvement (Covenant University, 2019). At the local government level, policy failures are frequently linked to vague mandates, political interference, unreliable data, and corruption—hindering effective grassroots development (Ijmsspcs, 2022).

In Enugu State, the Agricultural Development Programme (ENADEP) illustrates how exclusionary practices in policy design, lack of farmer participation, and poor leadership contribute to policy underperformance (Ijeais, 2021). This case highlights the critical role of stakeholder engagement and institutional robustness in achieving desired policy outcomes.

What is policy?

A policy is “conscious plan of action and the action itself, executed to address a particular societal problem (Tochukwu et al, 2018). In another word, policy is a course of action taken by a government, political party, business organization initiated to effect and take decisions on matters related to public (Lennon, 2023). Policy can be broadly defined as a deliberate system of principles, guidelines, or courses of action adopted by an individual, group, organization, or government to achieve rational outcomes in a given context. Thomas Dye (1972) defines public policy as "*whatever governments choose to do or not to do.*" This classic definition underscores both the actions taken and the inactions or omissions as forms of policy. James E. Anderson (2011) offers a more structured view,

describing policy as "*a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern*"

What is Public Policy?

Literally, when we talk about public policy, simply we refer to the different actions undertaken by the government (Prabhu et al, 2012). The best famous and shortest is the one given by Thomas R Dye (2013) says "policy is whatever the government choose to do or not to do". According to B Guy public policy is the total sum of government activities, whether acting directly or through an agent that work on its behalf, that has a positive impact on people's life. Yehezkel sees public policy from different angle of view where he exonerates public policy as government interrelated activities, for him public policy is a way of addressing a societal problem as a whole. With these definitions one will understand that, public policy is multi-faceted it affects our lives either directly or indirectly. No matter how good the policy was, it has an impact in our lives and vice-versa (Prabhu et al, 2012). In another word, some see public policy as actions of the government, whilst others put it as a detailed principle that guided government's actions (Mbaya et al, 2012). They further says, Public policy is a government effort to solve the burning issues that confronting society by enacting laws, regulations and important decisions to the problem at hand. Enormous issues can be solved by public policy which include but not limited to; economic, political, security, education etcetera. Government as a policy maker decides what policy should be enacted in order to addressed people's demand for the growth of a country. Naturally, a policy has to be criticized by individual it must face with some resistance from the public, but the policy makers will weigh its pros and cons of the policy prior getting them executed (Aminu et al, 2012). In a nutshell, public policy "refers to the principles, guidelines, or orientation adopted by a government body in guiding the affairs of people in a given polity". (Dlakwa, 2008).

Therefore, for people to accept any public policy, it has to undergo several stages of policy formulation process and scrutiny. In this situation, policy formulation is followed by policy demand, policy decision, and policy statement. A policy statement is a formal expression that provides a specific policy role, functions to its people (Aminu et al, 2012). However, once the government pronounced certain policy, that means such policy had already executed. The next step is policy implementation., which requires a feedback from people. The feedback will serve to checkmate the excesses of such policy if any. It will evaluate whether the policy has been accepted or not by the populace (Aminu et al, 2012).

African countries in general, and Nigeria is not an exception. Their policies suffer a great setback when it comes to implementation. Nigeria among other countries has been labeled as a country with on-paper non-practice policy. Implementation problem occurs

when the interest of the target beneficiaries is not served. And this problem of policy implementation is not solely restricted to the developing nations. As long as the critical factors for executing public policy are omitted thus, failure in the policy implementation (Makinde, 2005). The crucial factors that go hand in hand to assist or hinder policy implementation include: communication, resources, dispositions or attitude, and bureaucratic structure (Orizu et al, 2019 cited in Edward, 1980). Starting with the first factor, ‘communication’ any policy has to be communicated to the people who are beneficiaries. The policy has to be heard and understood by the people. As Mahatma Gandhi Says ‘whatever you do for me without me is against me’

The policy actors need to provide a kind of feedback mechanism let them hear the opinions of the people prior to implement it otherwise the policy will face resistance by the public. Two, ‘resources’ a government or any other body prior to come up with any course of action enough funding need to be provided for the policy to takes effect. Inadequate funding is one of the reasons why most public policy collapsed at the stage of implementation. The government need to have a kind of possibility study of every policy to determine its merit and viability. Thirdly, dispositions or attitude most policies may not be exempted from selfish interest of elite that uses people to cover their messes. This means that, only the issue that will favor them will be paid close attention to, while the poor and downtrodden were out-rightly neglected. Lastly, the bureaucratic structure, the bureaucrats are the one that saddled with responsibility of implementing these policies but unfortunately, Nigerian public policy technocrats appears to be the den of thieves as opined by the then minister of finance Dr. Okonjo Iweala (2017).

Therefore, when comparison these factors to Nigerian public policy implementation problem has been linked to almost all the aforesaid factors. As rightly captured by Dlakwa (2008) where he outlines some of the obstacles faced by public policy implementation includes: lack of clarity of mission and vision, at times politicians use a policy as cover of their hideous agenda. Some of the policies are just deceit. It doesn’t have the intention of executing it. As such, you wouldn’t expect any good outcomes from it not to talk of implementation. Two, crowded and unrealistic objectives or expectations, the policy has to be realistic in its objectives and expectations. Otherwise the policy would lead inevitably to poor performance or flop in its objectives. Thirdly, the resurrection of sensitive issues. Some of the policies bringing them back will only lead to chaos thus, ignite uncertainty in the society. That is why as a policy actor, you need to study the environment prior to embark on any project to avoid any bad outcomes that may occur.

Methodology:

For the study of public policy implementation issues and perspectives in Bauchi State the researcher relied on secondary data to attain the research's objectives which include: journals, textbooks, internet, magazines etcetera.

Results, & Analysis

For policy to take effect, the authoritative decisions and the opinion of other influential in the society has to be considered. However, public policy in Nigeria suffers a great set back in often times. Some of these hurdles include: corruption is also a factor militating against the policy implementation in Nigeria. The vast majority of policies are well formulated and appropriately budgeted, but corruption has perplexed its execution (Kolawole et al, 2018). Furthermore, according to a report by vanguard (2015), over 100billion naira was allotted to the then poverty alleviation program, but yet still Nigerian are living below the poverty line of 2\$ per day. Kolawale et al, reported that, most of the money allocated to these policies are diverted to personal used.

Moreover, public policy implementation is also affected by the behavior of the policy actors or implementers. If those who are saddled with the responsibility of implementing these policies do not have the political will or commitment, the policy will be affected in its implementation (Kolawole et al, 2018). Akinwumi (2010), I quote "when government set feasible policies for the state, the cabal that hold top echelon of government hostage at any point in time, often frustrate the implementation process of most well formulated policies". For instance, take look at energy sector, Nigeria is generating 2000 megawatts capacity with the huge money allocated every year to this sector. As testified by then senator of kogi west, Dino Melaye some powerful cabal in the government hijacked the implementation process of most of the lofty public policies of President Buhari (Premium Times, 2018).

In addition, international public opinion is another factor that militates against the public policy implementation in Nigeria. Every policy must be in conformity with both international and local opinions. The policy makers/implementers need to consider the views of the people in which the policy is going to take place. Otherwise the people will not abide by and they will reject it (Kolawole et al, 2018). No matter how good the policy it is, must not against the rule of law, good governance, and human rights of the people (Abubakar, 2013).

Discussion

Public policy implementation in Nigeria faced with so many challenges both externally and internally. To grasp the context of Nigeria's public policy implementation problem, one need to consider the social context, political, historical, and economic development (Azubuike, 2012). Its oblivious, that the public policy and the environment, as well as the circumstances of its operation are interwoven. That is why it's very crucial when bringing any policy, the implementers has to look at the environment, which comprises the people, attitudes, culture, and the religion.

The challenges bedeviled Nigeria's public policy implementation is something that need to be dealt with for the benefit of the Nigerian people, the government, and other stakeholders as a whole. In line of this paper, this study reasserts the following challenges according to Orizu et al, (2028) which the authority need to pay heed:

- i. Citizenry acceptance and approval of moral laxity and corruption. The Nigerian public policy is faced with this challenge. The Nigerian people is morally bankrupt where the people that supposed to be the antagonist of corruption are the one condoning it. No one bothers to know what the policy is all about neither to know their take as citizens in it.
- ii. Lack of enough funding. In Nigeria most policies are good but they are only available on papers. This is due to the inadequate funding in which most of the policy implementers found themselves in. this has crippled many public policies introduced by the government
- iii. Continuity deficiency problem. This is another problem bedeviling Nigerian public policy implementation in Nigeria. Lack of continuity of the regimes has affected many public policies in Nigeria. The government ought to be continuing. But due to the changes in regimes each successive government declined to execute the existing policies introduced by the previous administration, thus abandoned many good policies and project uncompleted
- iv. Inadequate technology for implementation of public policy. In often times, public policy implementers do not have managerial skills, modern technology, as a requirement for public policy implementation (Ujah et al, 2020).
- v. Unclear goals. Its evident that, different administration in Nigeria are opportune to have a multiple goal which in most case are convoluted. No matter how good the policy if it's unclear in its goals there would be no success at the end of it. Clarity of goals is very pertinent
- vi. Corruption and embezzlement. The corrupt practices of public officials have detriment the basic policy goals in Nigeria. Corruption is now become pandemic in our lives. And this has made the populace to distrust the officials when embarking in any project (Ujah, et al, 2020).

Recommendations:

Looking at the aforementioned problems, the study recommends that:

1. The government in conjunction with other stakeholders should be organizing a sensitization programme to change the care-free attitudes of people. The society need to be well vast on issues that related to their well-being. The government, in collaboration with civil society organizations, traditional institutions, and media outlets, should regularly organize sensitization programmes to reshape public attitudes toward government policies. Many citizens in Nigeria exhibit a care-free or skeptical attitude toward policies due to historical experiences of failed implementation or perceived marginalization (Aiyede, 2003). Public education on issues related to health, governance, environment, and economic participation empowers citizens to take ownership of policies that affect their well-being. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation and poor community engagement undermined public health interventions (Yusuf et al., 2020). Proactive sensitization campaigns helped to reverse this trend in states like Lagos through partnerships with community leaders and faith-based organizations.

2. The government needs to revisit some of its policies to avert the situation where by the society rejected the policy introduced by government. And government should have a proper understanding of the environment, the people prior to introduce any policy to them. Before introducing new policies, the government must undertake thorough environmental scanning and stakeholder consultations. Policies that are misaligned with local values, needs, or socio-economic realities are often rejected or poorly implemented. This was evident in Nigeria's attempt to remove fuel subsidies in 2012, which sparked nationwide protests due to a lack of public buy-in and perceived economic hardship (Ibeanu & Orji, 2013). Understanding the social, political, and cultural context of the target population ensures greater policy acceptance. Participatory policy design—where the public is involved through consultations or pilot testing—builds legitimacy and sustainability.

3. The remuneration of the Nigerian bureaucrats should be improved significantly. This will minimize the corruption indices in the public policy implementation process. Low salaries and poor working conditions among Nigerian public servants have historically contributed to corruption and inefficiency in policy implementation (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2013). Enhancing remuneration packages, career progression opportunities, and working environments can increase motivation, reduce rent-seeking behavior, and foster professional integrity. Countries like Rwanda and Botswana have demonstrated that improving civil service conditions correlates with lower corruption indices and more effective policy delivery (Afrobarometer, 2020).

4. The government should ensure that there is a continuity in its policies. Government should checkmate the policies introduced by the subsequent government, modified them where necessary and adopt a mechanism, all these will discourage deficiency syndrome in policy continuity in Nigerian public policy implementation process. Policy discontinuity—where one administration abandons the policies of its predecessor—is a recurring weakness in Nigerian governance (Olowu & Erero, 1997). To counter this, a mechanism for policy review, modification, and adaptation should be institutionalized. National policy frameworks should be codified and insulated from political manipulation. For example, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program experienced setbacks due to inconsistent implementation across different administrations. Ensuring that incoming governments build upon existing policies—rather than starting afresh—will address the “deficiency syndrome” and promote sustainability and coherence.

5. The government needs to employ people that has a technical know-how on issues related to public policies. Policy formulation and implementation require technical expertise in planning, monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. Employing professionals with a background in public administration, development studies, economics, or social policy is essential. The Nigerian civil service has often been plagued by political appointments and nepotism, sidelining competent professionals. Professionalization of the public sector, as seen in Singapore’s merit-based civil service, has been central to its efficient policy implementation (World Bank, 2018).

6. The Anti-corruption agencies need to checkmate the activities of the public policy implementers by ensuring that, the policy introduced has been implemented. Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) and ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices Commission) must move beyond prosecuting financial crimes to actively monitoring the implementation of public policies. Tracking progress, enforcing accountability, and ensuring that allocated resources are used as intended are crucial roles for these bodies.

Mechanisms like citizen scorecards, policy audits, and performance-based budgeting can strengthen oversight and public trust. In Kenya, for example, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) has developed public portals to report and track corruption in service delivery.

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