

The Challenges of Implementing Public Policies in Nigeria: Strategies for Effective Development in the Educational Sector.

Atelhe, George Atelhe & Akande, Benyin Adah

¹Department of Political Science, University of Calabar

²Department of Political Science, University of Calabar

Corresponding Author: Atelhe, George Atelhe

Abstract: The implementation of public policy in Nigeria has been hindered in various ways by different governments since the 1960s. The result of these challenges stem from the fact that governments suffered from a clear understanding of what constitutes public policy, and also as a result of policy inconsistency. Many governments' policies have not been effectively implemented for reasons of regime change, lack of political will, lack of bottom-top approach to policy, lack of consultation in policy or decision making and the like. This paper therefore intends to examine the challenges of public policy in Nigeria, with special focus on the education sector. Drawing from extent literature, and using a qualitative analysis, the paper argues that the militating factor against effective policy implementation lies with the lukewarm attitudes of bureaucratic institutions responsible for implementing these policies. Also, it is observed that inconsistency in policy and political will has also served as a major setback to effective policy implementation in Nigeria. The paper therefore is recommending that Policy goals should not be robust, rather, they should be formulated in relation to developmental needs and realities of the target population.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The need for enhancing the development process in the developing nations is ever becoming more critical and urgent. Effective implementation of public policies has thus become one of the most powerful weapons known for achieving this developmental strides in modern societies. It is also used for laying the foundation for a sustainable growth and development of any nation. The pace at which this can be realized is hinged essentially on the ability of the government to formulate appropriate policies and, very importantly, on the capability of the public bureaucracy to effectively implement the formulated policies. As rightly observed by Ikechukwu and Chukwemeka (2013), over the years in Nigeria, numerous brilliant public policies have been formulated and implemented. Yet there is no apparent and significant development as evidenced by the fact that Nigeria has continued to remain in the category of the Least Developed Countries of the world. This suggests that mere formulation of policies should become not the major issue in Nigeria but rather their effective implementation as it is only effectively implemented policies that can bring about national development.

Initially, the emphasis in the literature of policy studies was more on the policy formulation stage. In contemporary times, however, emphasis has shifted to policy implementation following the realization that effective implementation of policies is not an automatic affair (Egonmwan, 2015; Ikelegbe, 2006; Nweke, 2006). Again policy implementation has become of greater concern to its formulation particularly in developing nations like Nigeria where the government is increasingly looked upon by the citizens to effectively implement development projects and programmes and where, contrarily, ineffective implementation of policies has become very critical and worrisome. The pattern and nature of policy implementation is the major explanation for the failure or success of any given policy.

In this vein, Nwankwo and Apeh (2008) observe that the implementation of a policy is the most vital phase in the policy process as it is at this stage that the success or failure of a policy is determined. Ikelegbe (2006) and Nweke (2006) in this respect too, note that many policy failures result from ineffective implementation. In other words, the hallmark of any successful educational policy is effective implementation as it is only effectively implemented policy that solves societal problems. Dick (2013) also argues that policy implementation is about the most critical dimension in the policy process given the fact that the success or failure of any given policy is, to a high degree, a function of implementation. It is, perhaps in the context of the need for effective policy implementation and the likely factors that may constitute an obstacle

to it that Ikelegbe (2006) identified the following crucial questions bordering on the implementation of a given policy:

- How is the policy being implemented by the implementing institution?
- How is the target group responding to the implementation of the policy?
- Does the implementing institution have the resources to effectively implement the policy?
- Does the implementing institution have the willingness and motivation to implement the policy as directed?
- Is the societal problem adequately understood through wide consultation and proper analysis and for which the policy is being implemented considered adequate and in the right direction?
- To what extent does personal, group or institutional interest or prejudice predispose the implementing institution not to implement the policy the way it is intended or not to implement it at all?
- How does the relevant government organ monitor and supervise the implementation of the policy?

Challenges of Policy Implementation in Nigeria: A Case of the National Education Policy

The education policy is one of those numerous policies that have faced serious challenges at its implementation stage. Majority of this challenge is linked to the lackadaisical attitudes of the institutions responsible for implementing the National Education Policy. This institutional framework constitutes the public bureaucracies, and they are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of the objectives of the National Education Policy. Public bureaucracy has become inevitable in any modern society and, as such, much importance is attached to it (Mankinde, 2005). This is because it is the public bureaucracy that determines the course and speed of policy implementation. Technically, it is the public bureaucracy that decides what should be done, how it should be done and who actually benefits. It is indeed, the public bureaucracy that translates formulated policies into practical reality. In essence, public bureaucracy bridges the gap between the legislative intent and its fulfillment. Dick (2013) notes that public bureaucracy has become a pervasive nature of modern societies and ever growing in importance. Indeed, the role of public bureaucracy as a veritable tool of change and development is no more in doubt. The adequacy and efficiency of public bureaucracy is, therefore, vitally important to the entire nation and to all areas of development process (Abah, 2010). This is because the capacity of the public bureaucracy determines what will be done, where it will be done, when and how well it will get done. If the public bureaucracy lacks the capacity to effectively implement a policy, such a policy cannot achieve its goals and objectives. Indeed, the greater the capacity of the public bureaucracy to effectively implement policies, the greater the development potential of that society. In Nigeria, it is evident that the planning, programming and implementation of policy and programmes suffer grossly from planning inconsistency and weak organizational structures due to political instability, and over centralized mechanism of decision making and execution (Jiboye, 2013; Adeniyi, 2014). Despite huge allocations of money to the education sector in the National Development Plans, very little was achieved in terms of meeting specified targets in providing qualitative education to the masses. This is especially true for primary education in Nigeria. A number of reasons can be adduced for this. The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) nationwide in 1976 experienced problems of under-estimation of about 30 percent of the turn-up number of the children enrolment, acute shortage of classroom spaces, shortage of teachers and equipment. This has indicated that primary school education is under-funded; most of the primary sections controlled and financed by the government are in shamble (Odey and Domike, 2015). Also to be considered is the level of inconsistency by the government in its approach and strategies aimed at achieving the goal of the National Education Policy, as matters relating to education are constantly transferred to different government ministries from one government regime to the other. Despite various inadequacies in the existing education policy framework in Nigeria, the indispensability of Public sector intervention in education must be emphasized, especially for low-income earners. Since education is essential for man's existence and the development of human potential; its adequacy, both qualitatively and numerically enhances the health, welfare and productivity of the individual and consequently the wealth of the nation. (Jiboye et al, 2011).

In ideal situations, institutional frameworks responsible for the implementation of educational policies are known and desired essentially for its reliability, efficiency, speed, dependability and effectiveness in implementing the objectives of the National Education Policies. This is what it actually is, to a very reasonable extent, in developed nations. In developing nations, like Nigeria however, these institutions appear to be obviously far from being such, as its operations and activities is very much fraught with some challenges arising from the existence of certain negative factors and circumstances (Mankinde, 2005).

According to Abah, (2010), basically and very critical is that the National Education Policy implementing institutions in Nigeria operates under ineffective and corrupt political leadership. The leadership corruption, and ineptitude, for instance, affects the content and quality of policy at formulation stage. For instance, policies are, more often than not, made for purposes of the selfish and egoistic interest of the political leaders and sometimes only to attract public acclaim and attention with less regard to their appropriateness in addressing given problems or the possibility of their effective practical implementation by the public bureaucracy (Mankinde, 2005). Indeed, most education policies goals in Nigeria are subordinated to the personal

rewards and interests of the political leaders and their colleagues with the result that a policy is judged more on its political merits with the real development need rarely factored into consideration. For these, most education policies in Nigeria are either inappropriate or lack well defined objectives and programmes for their effective implementation. It is perhaps for this, that Okoli and Onah (2002) state that implementation of policies in Nigeria take the form of “learning process” or “trial and error”. In this context, policies or programmes are haphazardly implemented and even sometimes abandoned or dismantled midway because the basis for formulating the policy was not, in the first instance, predicated on existing data, realities or need. Indeed, in Nigeria there are usually no comprehensive policy standards and objectives to guide the bureaucracy in its policy implementation activities and procedures (Makinde, 2005).

Some Education policies actually tend to be over ambitions, sweeping and overly fundamental in nature (Mankinde, 2005). In most cases, the formulation of such over ambitions policies is not even borne out of genuine or sincere effort to bring about rapid and radical development but just to boast the ego of the political leaders. For such policies, there are usually inadequate resources (men and materials) for the institutions to effectively implement them.

Another critical factor inhibiting effective implementation of National Education policy in Nigeria is that some agencies or institutions saddled with the responsibility of implementing given policies do not possess the requisite manpower and financial resources to effectively implement them. On the issue of inadequate resources, for instance, Government, sometimes, do not budget adequately to enable the public bureaucracy properly implement formulated policies (Ikelegbe, 2006; Dick, 2003). Indeed, to effectively implement policies, the implementing agency needs resources in adequate and timely manner and such not being the case in Nigeria explains, in part, the failure of certain public policies to achieve desirable ends, (Nweke, 2006; Ikelegbe, 2012). Sometimes, though, government gives out sufficient fund but the corrupt activities within the public bureaucratic organizations do not allow for its judicious use to effectively execute policy programs. In any case, insufficient financial resources has resulted to situations where laws could not be enforced, services were not provided and reasonable regulation not developed and applied (Makinde, 2005). On the issue of inadequate human resources, the public bureaucracy in Nigeria do not, indeed, have adequate staff in terms of overall numbers and more importantly in terms of specific areas of professional, technical or managerial competence and expertise (Aluko and Adesopo; 2002). Where abilities exist, policies could be confidently formulated with reasonable assurance of their effective implementation. Indeed, as Nnamdi (2011) notes, education policies has, in contemporary times, assumed complex and sophisticated dimension that require highly skilled and experienced bureaucrats for their effective implementation. It is worthy of note that the inadequacy of personnel, particularly as it relates to expertise and skilled manpower, results in part, from the personnel recruitment policies into the Nigerian public bureaucracy which are essentially based on non-bureaucratic criteria such as the state of origin or ethnic group against objectively measurable criteria like qualification and professional competence (Amucheazi, 2013; Anikeze, 2014). The application of the principle, popularly known as Quota System or Federal Character results to putting people in job positions where they do not have the basic competencies and skill. This, ultimately, affects the ability of the Nigerian public bureaucracy to effectively implement policies. Again, the challenge of keeping away personal interest, prejudice and the influence of primordial values in the conduct of official business by bureaucrats is equally very critical in Nigeria. Usually, if the bureaucrats are not favorably disposed towards a policy, they may not approach its implementation with the enthusiasm and zeal that it’s effectively implementation may require. Makinde (2005), in this respect, contends that the zeal with which bureaucrats in Nigeria implement education policy depends on how they see the policy as affecting their personal, ethnic and organizational interest and aspirations. Positive effects will induce enthusiastic implementation while the contrary may mean that implementation may be resisted, thwarted and even sabotaged (Ikelegbe, 2006). The ultimate result of this is ineffective implementation of education policies that makes the realization of their goals and objectives difficult. Indeed, some policy implementing agencies or bureaucracy in Nigeria possess certain primordial interests or values that dissipate implementation favor and clog, delay, distort and mar proper and effective policy implementation.

Another constraining factor to effective implementation of education policy in Nigeria is undue pervasive political influence on the public bureaucracy (Amucheazi 2013). Usually, in Nigeria, the political leaders formulate policies and as well control and direct the implementation activities of the policy. This situation is not proper as such control and directive are mostly motivated by selfish personal or political interests. Indeed, the bureaucracy cannot effectively implement policies and meaningfully contribute to national development if it is fettered, controlled and directed by political authorities. This is more so as in extreme cases of such political control, in Nigeria, the bureaucrats are not even allowed to take decisions or actions on basic routine administrative matters without consultation and the consent of relevant political authorities. In this process, much time and energy is wasted and prompt actions required for effective implementation of policies hampered. Given this, therefore, one can posit that the extent to which politics influence the bureaucratic activities will continue to determine and shape the extent to which policies can be properly and effectively implemented by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria. Very worrisome is the fact that the political influence or hold on the public bureaucracy is becoming tighter as promotion to the headship positions in some public

bureaucratic organization is based on political patronage or loyalty and not on the basis of relevant or cognate experience and seniority. Bureaucrats promoted under such circumstance will be more morally bound to subject their official decisions and actions, substantially, to the wishes, preferences, control and endorsement of their political masters. Abrogation of a policy effects their implementation by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria. It is observable that each new political leadership in Nigeria is usually and primarily concerned with making its own impression on public programmes and projects. For this, certain policies or programmes which are already being effectively implemented are shelved by the succeeding administration (Nnamdi, 2011). Presidents, Ministers, Governors, Local Government Chairmen and heads of institutions (both bureaucratic and political heads) in Nigeria exhibit the tendency to link their administration with distinct social and economic policies or programmes. Consequently, the policies of preceding administrations are rarely pursued by succeeding ones and such personality styles of administration help to explain why so little attention is paid to the issue of maintenance of projects or programmes created or initiated by preceding regimes. Indeed, succeeding regimes conceive the maintenance of existing programmes as not politically expedient as it does not bring direct personal glory or credit. In this circumstance, the public bureaucracy in Nigeria do not have the opportunity and time to effectively and conclusively implement policies. The changes and discontinuities are, therefore, very unnecessary and unproductive as it only reflected the political leaders selfish desire to associate policies distinctively and nominally with their government leadership.

Ways of Tackling Policy Implementation Challenges in Nigeria

The major step towards ensuring effective implementation of policies in Nigeria is through adopting the principle of Good Administration. The concept of good administration redefines administrative operation and citizen-administration relationships (Sigma, 2012). It responds to the expectation and requirement of a balanced approach to safeguarding the public interest whilst respecting the rights and interests of the citizens. Good Administration serves the community and promotes social trust in the executive power; it thus contributes to political stability and fosters economic development and social wealth.

According to Rusch (2013), putting the principles of good administration into practice requires an appropriate system of administrative procedures. This involves a set of rules that determine the process of making administrative decisions. A good system of administrative procedures ensures the legality as much as the quality of administrative decisions; it also protects citizens' rights and promotes citizens' participation. It further enhances transparency and accountability by avoiding unnecessarily complicated, formalistic and lengthy processes. Under these conditions, transaction costs for citizens and per capita government expenditures are reduced. Also in the view of Sparks (2013), effective policy implementation requires a modern democratic governance which is expected to transform both the role of the state and the citizen. The citizen is not passive and a subject to the exercise of state authority but is seen as an asset: the citizen is given space as an active member, a partner who can contribute to the general welfare. His/her input, cooperation and participation is encouraged and sought after as a necessary condition for democratic and efficient governance, and for economic development. In this perspective, the implementation of policies in Nigeria requires a new dimension. This involves a new place for values such as transparency, simplicity and clarity, participation, responsiveness and "citizen oriented" performance.

Effective implementation of policies revolves around an element of accountability. According to Rufus (2015), the activities revolving around the implementation of policies should be open to scrutiny and review by other administrative and legislative authorities as well as the courts. Supervision ensures that the principles embedded in policy implementation are honored by the public authorities. In order to make accountability and control possible, policy implementers are expected to document the steps and procedures taken in their records, including the requests and applications, the evidence, minutes, information concerning the delivery of various policies (Odu, 2012). Accountability in the policy sector also involves the possibility for each individual citizen to lodge a complaint to an independent body. More and more countries dispose of institutions to defend citizen rights vis-à-vis public administration. Such is the role of an Ombudsman who acts as an external mechanism of control, investigates complaints about maladministration and recommends corrective action where necessary. The Public Sector is established to provide services to the community and cater for its wellbeing rather than be there for self-enrichment and aggrandizement resulting in frustrating persons having something to do with government. As stated in Akwa, (2000) quoting Section 2 of the Civil Service Handbook 1997, "A Civil Servant is expected to assist in formulating and implementing the policies approved by Government whatever his personal or private opinions or attitudes may be. He has the duty to advice on the implications of a policy or action".

Thus, the government has a social responsibility therefore to ensure adequate provision of qualitative policies for the people. In other to achieve this goal, there is the need for a redirection and redefinition of existing policy framework which should be made relevant to the present developmental needs and realities, and formed within the context of global sustainable housing and urban development realities.

II. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

In Nigeria, it is evident that the planning, programming and implementation of the policy and programmes suffer grossly from planning inconsistency and weak organizational structures due to political instability, and over centralized mechanism of decision making and execution. This has greatly affected the focus of vibrant policies that may have had significant impact on the development of the nation. In order to achieve the execution of more vibrant policies, the following should be adopted by implementing institutions:

- Policy goals should not be robust, rather, they should be formulated in relation to developmental needs and realities of the target population.
- The citizens should be allowed to participate actively in the policy processes, as this will bring about a higher level of commitment from various parties involved at the implementation stage
- Effective implementation can only be achieved through accountability, thus, the accountability of implementing institutions can only be guaranteed if the welfare of the personnel are guaranteed by the government.

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