

The Poverty of Policy Execution: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: *Policy summersault in Nigeria has to a large extent eroded public confidence in government's ability to provide essential service as a way of solving societal problems. There is greater attention being paid to public policy execution in and out of intellectual discourse. The concept of public policy execution is not without its attending challenges and creative process of getting it done. Thus various proposals are faced with difficulties enroute execution. Various proposals fail to materialise, while those that do appeared distorted or mutilated, for them not to serve their envisioned drives. This paper objectively examines the challenges of policy execution in Nigeria. The paper relies on primary and secondary data for analysis and presentation these underlying factors. The paper found that effective policy execution can only be attained through unceasing commitment politically with clear responsibilities definition and effective coordination, by ensuring that genuinely, commitment to elimination of corruption at all levels of government is achieved for free flow of policy execution process. The paper concluded that poverty of policy execution is premised on government genuine commitment*

Keywords: Policy, Execution, Implementation, Government

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has faced preponderant challenges over the years. Oguejiofor (2004) averred that the misfortune arising from the amalgamation and joining together of diverse cultural background by

the colonialists has engendered political instability, threatened peaceful co-existence arising from kidnapping, religious tension and intolerance, cybercrimes prevalence among the teeming youths, the threat caused by the toxic Boko Haram in the Northern region that is fast spreading to other regions, rising unemployment rates, and other economic challenges affecting the Nigerian state. From the foregoing, Achebe (1983) submits that the challenge of the country is predominantly that of leadership. The country is enmeshed in leadership debacle despite parading vast human resources in all spheres of endeavours. To make sound policies, brilliant leaders are needed not only in the formulation process, but execution aimed at developing the country on all sides. Policy execution has been considered the most critical aspects of policy process, which has often encountered problems. This is the challenge facing the Nigeria society today in its drive to attain national development. Execution has often become the graveyard of various formulated policies. Experience has shown that little or no attention is given to policy execution by the Nigerian policy makers. More often than not, policy execution is treated with disdain as it does not enjoy government's priority as soon as it is formulated through execution to attain its purpose. Sadly in Nigeria, challenges of policy execution is not given due attention. On several occasions, when policy is about to be drawn, huge amount of funds are devoted to preparing and designing plans for all types of policies without giving thought to the intricacies of mutual variables and interactions necessary, which has always been widening the lacuna between purposes of policies and results of policies executed. The need to advance the process of development in Nigeria is increasingly becoming more centrally urgent in the discourse of policy orientation. The urgent pace that can expedite realization of this objective is anchored on government's ability to formulate suitable policies and ensure effective execution of these policies.

The situation typifies a situation of disparity between policies designers' intentions and aggregate of powerful forces of administration and politics including spread of corruption in the system. The attendant failure that characterized the major policies in most developing societies, including Nigeria has helped in directing attention to the urgent need for policy execution management and planning explicitly, which adequate attention is given to only institutional and political capacity for developmental projects execution and operations. In the period of 1970 United Nation second development plan, there was an emergence of models and theories postulated to address lackluster attitude towards plan feasibility as against plan formulation. These theoretical paradigms were designed to assist policy makers, particularly in the area of understanding the issues associated with policy execution (Egonmwan, 2009). This paper attempts to analyse the poverty of policy in Nigeria from the Nigerian experience.

Conceptual Crification

Policy

There is no doubt that policy in all its fashion and purpose is a swift response to the identified problems of society and people. It is aimed at solving problems that have bearing on the peoples' welfare. Simmons (1974) defined a policy is "a target, a guide to action, encompassing values

which set priority and relations”. Friedrich (1975) described 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) viewed a policy as “a course of action or a programme of actions, which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems”. A process of making applicable organisational and institutional decisions, which entails clarifying diverse substitutes such as expenditures priorities, programmes and choice making techniques among those alternatives that is clearly based on the effect they portend. Ajoboye (2011) likened policies to a comprehensive managerial, political, administrative and financial mechanism organised to achieve plain targets and set goals. A human dissatisfaction or deprivation, need, identified by others or self-identified through which a respite is pursued is a policy (Egonmwan, 2000).

Public Policy

In academic discourse, different definitions of authors abound on public policy and determining the wrong or correct one may simply be efforts in futility. However, various scholars consider policy execution as a distinct activity, which follows policy formulation. This perception is held based on the fact that there is slight appreciable element on which support for policies as an essential part of policy design is built. The widely held perception about separation of policy formulation from execution has generated criticism from scholars such as Wildavsky and Pressenca (1973) as having no sense of direction in the original context. Their argument was premised on the fatality of separation of policy design from policy execution. According to them, “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” (Egonmwan, 2009).

Historically, Henri (2006) traced public policy back to 4000 years in the Babylon city as he defined it “as it as a course of action adopted and pursued by the government towards the accomplishment of set objectives”. Similarly, Ross (1969) in his suggestion was of the view that public policy should be considered as related long series of less or more activities and their results for the concerned beyond mere distinct decision.

Anifowose and Enemu (2005) termed public policy as “purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern”. Anifowose and Enemu (2005) went further by stressing that public policy at a broader level is largely concerned with the interaction between environments and government. Defining public policy, Dye (1979) considers it as the choice of government action or not. He explained further by explaining that in the real sense, government does various things by regulating societal conflicts, organizing society conflicting nature and ensure distribution of large range of figurative materials and rewards services to each and every society members in form of tax most times perhaps. Policy therefore

acts as a regulatory agent of human behaviour, organisation bureaucracies, and distribution of benefits and extraction of taxes simultaneously.

More often than not, an important point worthy of consideration is the concept of “non-decision”. Decision of government to favour the continuity of the *status quo ante* usually form the basis of ignoring societal problems or attempt to make changes in a policy framework. Moreover, sometimes, there are differences between government intention and what they actually execute, which is the reality often experienced in the Nigerian governance context.

Emphasising further on the importance of public policy concept vis-à-vis coercion policy thoughts, Lowi (1970) asserts that policy is largely involving a great deal of “deliberate coercion”. In other words, policy as a statement aimed at delineation of means, purpose, object and subject of the intended exercise of coercion within the power relationship in organisational structure context. Identifying specific elements differentiating other policies from public policy, Basu (2006) highlighted the following dichotomy to include:

Result oriented action beyond random behaviour is the trademarks of public policy. “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. Public policy may be either positive or negative in form. Positively, it may involve some form of government action regarding any issues or problem, negatively, it may involve a decision by government officials not to take action on matter on which government opinion, attitude or action is asked for. Public policy refers to the action or decisional pattern by public administrator on particular issues over a period rather than their separate discrete decision” (Basu, 2006:124).

Motives behind Public Policies

In relation to government action, public policies are made to provide answers to governments want to do and efforts to take in order to accomplish their set objectives in addressing a particular societal problem. Either private or public, all policies are purpose-driven. Policies are meant to attain certain goals. Almond, Powell, Strom, and Dalton (2004) identified reasons for policy action by governments as follows:

- i. A developing country such as Nigeria is tenets on distributive policies are the main concern of the people because “this is the policy aspect that will impact meaningfully in their lives.
- ii. 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.
- iii. However, public policy failure in Nigeria is informed by the failure of country’s citizens to meaningfully participate in the progress of their immediate society.

iv. This is because failure of policy reduces motivation of the people and creates an atmosphere of less patriotism.

Contradictionss of Policy Execution in Nigeria

A concern with implementation emerged as an outgrowth of the renewed interest in the substance of policy among post behavioural era. Scholars such as Ololube (2018a,b) and Alasomuka and Ololube (2020) argued that “it is imperative and legitimate for policy content to characterize policy making processes and progress. Public policy implementation has been described as one of the major problem confronting developing countries. Egonmwan (2009) argued that relatively, the successful implementation of public policy is difficult in first world countries, it is more difficult in the third world countries, 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 intention and result”.

Execution scholars display wide varieties on a crucial number of concerns. The beginning or the end of execution of policy is riot defined. While execution is commonly denoted as a stage of policy process, boundaries of policy are not clearly defined as well. Scholars differ in their identification of serious factors touching on execution. Standards for appraising execution accomplishment are contradictory. Moreover, the modest, most conventional forward path for execution has shown relative difficulty.

The Nigerian state is currently “swimming in the ocean of abject poverty, absence of basic social amenities and painful level of under-development. All these problems are because we do not have good policies to remove the country from these dying situations, but because the policies are not fully implemented. Several studies have showed over the years that, the major problem we have with developmental growth in Nigeria is not policy making, but implementation. That has made Nigeria not to be on the fast lane of development. It is however a paradox that, most of these policies only exist on mere words and paper and are never implemented to actualized the objectives of such policies. The culture of non-implementation of public policies is therefore in a very degree in the country and virtually affects all levels of government”.

Quite a number of execution researchers make a theoretical difference between policy formulation and execution, which for them means carrying our 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.

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 & 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.

Poverty of Policy: The Implications

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. 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-execution 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. Less 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. Isolation: 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. Less-development: 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. GDP and Economic Growth: 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.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized primary source of data using questionnaire administration. 150 questionnaire was administered to randomly selected respondents in three purposively states in Southwest, Nigeria. This was to sample opinion on what they think are the challenges bedeviling policy execution in Nigeria.

Table 1: Challenges facing policy execution in Nigeria

Statements	Level of Agreement (%) (n=150 for pooled sample)				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Corruption in execution stage	24.7	61.3	4	4	6
Lack clearly defined policy framework with no proper guidelines	26.7	52.7	12.7	6.7	1.3
Political instability, political interference, policy and macro-economic dislocations	22.7	50.7	15.3	10	1.3
Abandonment of project arising from poor governance	11.3	58.7	18	7.3	4.7
Inadequate funding and Poor human capital development	23.7	52.3	10	7.3	6.7

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 1 addressed the objective of the study, which is to measure the degree to which respondent agree or disagree on the challenges facing policy execution in Nigeria using Likers scale of measurements, such as: strongly agreed, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree ranging 1 to 5. As shown in table 1, 86% constituting majority of the respondent captured in this category, affirmed there was corruption in execution stage. An indication that corruption affected the execution of projects aimed at reducing the problems for which the policy is intended. This affected public perception of government will to ensure good governance through the instrumentality of policy action. Moreover, as revealed in the table above, 79.4% of the respondents were of the opinion that lack clearly defined policy framework with no proper guidelines possess a challenge to policy execution. This indicated that no definite framework for executing policy and this affected the way government approached policy issues in Nigeria for development purpose. In table 1, there was an agreement level of 73.4% of the respondents that political interference political instability, macro-economic and policy dislocations were an issue. The position of respondents on this is clearly evidenced in the percentage above that there was a noticeable political issues affecting how policies of government are executed. As shown in table above, 70% of the respondents agreed that abandonment of project arising from poor governance. This implied that policy execution was more likely to be affected by how government abandons it in the process of putting it to shape. Government usually leaves the projects hanging in the balance as a result of poor governance. As presented in table 1, 76% of the respondents agreed that inadequate funding and poor human capital development affected policy execution. This implies that funding as a critical component of policy execution was not given adequate attention thus making execution of

policy to suffer. The respondents view above showed that the poverty of policy execution is a source of growing concern for the citizens of the country. However, more challenges such as lack of political will, loss of focus and insensitivity of the government among others were also attributed to the failure of policy in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Policy execution deficiencies in Nigeria have been a recurring decimal. From the analysis above, it is evident that policies overtime have not enjoyed relative attention when they get to execution stage, which is considered the most critical height of policy process. Many challenges listed and analysed above are responsible for policy execution deficiency. Government has not demonstrated goodwill, good intentions and direction of purpose towards achieving a sound policy execution framework. Abandonment of policies in Nigeria lead to suffering of the citizens as they do not eventually translate into solving societal problems against original purpose. In order words, the wellbeing of the people are not catered for in the long run as a result of policy summersault. Policy deficiency and failure reflects governments' negative side.

Recommendations

In order to avoid poverty of policy execution, the following recommendations are worthy of note

Government should put proper framework in place to address policy failure through proper legislation and with punishment attached for offenders of policy diversions and non-activeness. Every government, institutions and administration should ensure that policies are pursued to a logical conclusion as against abandonment that is the order of the day in recent and time past. This can be done with mandate given to every Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to give reports on the progress of every policy targets.

There should be adequate funding of policies execution. This will help to drive speedy conclusion and avoid unwholesome desertion.

Citizens should be allowed to participated in policy process, particularly execution. This will drive all-inclusiveness and give sense of belongings to the people as the actions of government through policy is expected to solve their immediate societal problems.

Government must as a matter of legislation ensure that all policies are subjected to periodic review to avoid overlooking critical aspects of the documents. This should involve all tiers of government and all its layers including MDAs, Non-government Organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations and international communities.

Government should also bring about a platform for accessing policy execution progress. Policy execution should be people oriented and people centred to form a mutual response between both the people and policy actors.

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