

THE OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION BY THE PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY IN DEVELOPING NATIONS: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The need for enhancing the development process in the developing nations is ever becoming more critical and urgent. 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. Over the years in Nigeria, numerous brilliant policies have been formulated and implemented. Yet there is no apparent and significant development to show for that 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. Against this background, the study explored the importance of public policy in governance and public administration-generally, deeply discussed public bureaucracy and its role in policy implementation, critically examined and analyzed the key obstacles inhibiting the public bureaucracy in Nigeria from effectively implementing policies. In carrying out the study, the secondary sources of information or data gathering were mostly relied on and consequently, content analysis technique was adopted in the analysis. The basic finding is that there exists, indeed, some factors and circumstances that constitute serious obstacles to effective policy implementation by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria. These factors, among others, include the ineffective and corrupt political leadership under which the public bureaucracy in Nigeria thrives, the pervasive and deep rooted corruption within the public bureaucracy and the pressure and influence of primordial demands and values on the bureaucracy which negatively effect implementation activities and processes. Recommendations offered to overcome the obstacles and challenges and to reposition the Nigeria public bureaucracy for effective implementation of policies include, basically, that government should work towards ensuring the evolvment of both purposeful and responsible political and bureaucratic leaderships as well as work towards further realization of politics and administration dichotomy in Nigeria in order to create room for the bureaucracy to operate and implement policies essentially on the basis of laid down ideal bureaucratic rules and principles. The bureaucrats need too to strongly de-emphasize primordial considerations and to resist primordial pressures and demands for special favours in policy implementation activities and processes while government also need to constantly develop appropriate programs for improving the working conditions, and other incentives for the public bureaucrats in order to build their morale and commitment to public service. This, too, could reasonably diminish the propensity among the bureaucrats to misappropriate funds allocated for implementing development policies.

Key words: Obstacles, Policy, effective policy implementation, bureaucracy, bureaucrats, development, developing nations.

1. Introduction

In every society, there must exist some problems. These problems could be in the areas of politics, commerce, education, agriculture, communication, housing, transportation, health etc. In order to solve these problems as they might exist at given points in time, government is always seen formulating policies in response to them and in relation to the objectives of growth, national development and well being of the citizens. This is necessary because if attempts are not made to address these problems as they arise, they may degenerate into uncontrollable stages with the society's social-economic growth and development endangered.(Okoli and Onah, 2002). For this, the scope and effects of public policy is usually very pervasive and dominant particularly in developing nations like Nigeria with a very weak private sector (Ikelegbe 2006, Abah, 2010). For instance, it is the making and implementation of public policies that determine, for instance, the level of provision of social services, the availability of financial services for economic activities, the level of industrialization, the level of employment opportunities, the level of social or economic inequality, the availability of health facilities, the level of social security, the pace of educational development etc.

Fundamentally, a public policy is a government action or proposed action directed at achieving certain desired goals or objectives (Ikelegbe, 2006). In the light of a given societal problem, public policy guides and determines present and future public decisions as well as private individual or private business institutional actions, decisions or behavior. In essence, a public policy determines the activities of government and given private institutions in relation to providing services designed to solve a given problem. Usually, policies are made or formulated by the legislative arm of the government in both the federal, state or local government tiers and implemented by the public bureaucracy or designated private institutions. In most cases, however, it is the public bureaucracy that is saddled with the responsibility of policy implementation. Indeed, in virtually every country of the world, public policies are implemented primarily by the public bureaucracy and specifically by the bureaucrats or career civil servants that work in them (Ezeani, 2006). To this extent, therefore, the role of government in development is, to a very large extent, the role of the public bureaucracy (Abah, 2010). This role the public bureaucracy, plays through the effective implementation of government policies, projects and programmes aimed at achieving development goals and objectives. Most often in Nigeria, however, policies are well and brilliantly formulated but ineffectively implemented by the bureaucracy (Obodoechi, 2009; Ikelegbe, 2006). This leads to the failure of public policies to achieve their target goals and objectives and to ultimately alleviate the problems for which they were designed. Indeed, there is usually wide gaps between formulated policy goals and the achievement of those goals as a result of ineffective implementation in almost all facets of public administration in Nigeria (Ozor, 2004; Mankinde, 2005).

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, 1984; 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. Against this back ground, and in line with the argument of Ugo and Ukpere (2011) that an adequate solution to the problem of effective policy implementation failures in Nigeria must stem logically from a rigorous examination and analysis of its causes, the study is set to look at policy implementation as a major stage in the policy process, to highlight the need and the role of public bureaucracy in effective implementation of policies, examine obstacles that constrain the effective

implementation of policies by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria and to make recommendations on how to address the challenges and strengthen the capability of the Nigerian public bureaucracy towards effective implementation of formulated policies.

Clarification of concepts

(a) **Policy:** The term policy is central to the operation and activities of both private organizations and public institutions. A policy option made by an individual or private institution is known as private policy while the one made by government or its institutions is called public policy (Ozor, 2004). However, the term policy as it is used in this work refers to only the ones made by government and which are, as such, regarded as public policies.

Generally, scholars have viewed the term policy differently and from various perspectives. Some emphasize policy as an action. Others see it as choice. Yet, some see it in terms of scope of action (Ikelegbe, 2006). In other words, the way a given scholar conceptualizes a policy depends on the perspective from which the scholar is viewing it and this accounts for the varied definition of the concept. For instance, in the view of Egonwan (1991), it is a governmental programme of action, while to Abdulsalami (in Yakubu and Obasi, 1998), a policy refers to hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring government action for their solution. To Ezeani (2006), it is the proposed course of action which government intends to implement in respect of a given problem or situation confronting it. Ikelegbe (2006:3), in a more elaborate form, defines policy thus;

It is the integrated course and programmes of action
that government has set and the framework or guide it
has designed to direct action and practices in certain
problem area

In essence, a policy is a course setting action that provides the direction, the guide and the way to the achievement of certain goals or objectives desired by government. Examples of major policies in Nigeria include, among others, the following:

- The National Policy on Education formulated in 1977 to achieve the objective of acquiring appropriate skill and competence, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of Nigerian society (National Policy on Education, 1977)
- The National Population Policy of 1988 which basic objective is to provide Nigerians the necessary information and education on the value of reasonable family size to both the individual family and the future of the nation in achieving self-reliance (Okoli and Onah 2002)
- The National Housing Policy of 1991 which major objective is to address the housing needs of Nigerians by achieving significant increase in supply of housing so as to bring relief especially to the public or civil servants (Okoli and Onah, 2002).
- The Poverty Alleviation Policy of Olusegun Obasanjo's government which has, as its basic objective the reduction of poverty through the provision of welfare packages to the poor and the unemployed in Nigeria (Ozor, 2004).

(b) **Policy implementation:** The next and most crucial stage after policy formulation is its implementation. It is, perhaps, for its importance that some scholars refer to the policy implementation stage as the hub of policy process. Fundamentally, policy implementation is the process of translating a policy into actions and presumptions into results through various projects and programmes (Okoli and Onah, 2003; Ikelegbe, 2006). Kraft and Furlong (2007) and Ajaegbu and Eze (2010) state that policy implementation actually refers to the process and activities involved in the application, effectuation and administration of a policy. A variety of activities are involved in policy implementation that may include issuing and enforcing directives, disbursing funds, signing

contracts, collecting data and analyzing problems, hiring and assigning personnel, setting committees and commissions, assigning duties and responsibilities and also making interim decisions etc (Nweke, 2006).

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 policy is effective implementation as it is only effectively implemented policy that solves societal problems. For this too, Dick (2003) 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?

(c) Effective policy implementation:

Fundamentally and according to Hornby (2010), the word effective refers to producing the results that is wanted or intended or producing a successful result. In the context of this work, effective policy implementation, therefore, entails implementing a policy in such a way as to produce, attain or realize the goals and objectives of the policy. In essence, if a policy is effectively implemented, the designed and planned development goals and objectives are realized. The basic end or focus of the bureaucratic activities should then be on how best to effectively implement policies.

(d) Public bureaucracy

Basically, bureaucracy involves a hierarchical positioning of jobs and responsibilities in such a planned and rational manner and guided by such internal rules and regulations as to obviate the intermixture of personal interests with official functions/roles (Ozor, 2004). The rules and regulations also define the duties of members and the procedures for carrying out official duties based on formal structures and authority. In simple terms, bureaucracy is a formal administrative structure with distinct operational features that include division of labour, hierarchy of authority, impersonality, rationality, neutrality and system of rules among others (Ezeani, 2006).

The term bureaucracy applies to private complex and large business firms, churches and public organizations (Heady, 1992). However, our focus in this study is the public bureaucracy and which in Nigeria is composed of the federal civil service, the civil services of the 36 states and the

Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, the civil services of the 774 local government areas, the Federal and State parastatals or corporations, the armed forces bureaucracy the police bureaucracy, federal and state agencies, institutions and commissions etc. Bureaucrats which is a derivative of bureaucracy refers to those who work and operate within the public bureaucracy.

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 (2003) 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 summary, we posit that for any government to be seen as administratively competent, there must be evidence of the near absence of a gap between the intentions of a policy and the actual achievement of these intentions or goals. And this can only come to be when the public bureaucracy implements policies effectively. For this, therefore, the issue of effective policy implementation needs to be taken seriously both in practice and in academic discourse.

1.1: Obstacles to effective policy implementation by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria

In ideal situations, bureaucracy is known and desired essentially for its reliability, efficiency, speed, dependability and effectiveness in implementing policies. This is what it actually is, to a very reasonable extent, in developed nations. In developing nations, like Nigeria however, the bureaucracy appears 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. Key among these factors include the followings:-

➤ Basically and very critical is that the bureaucracy 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. Indeed, most policy making 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 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. (Mankinde, 2005).

➤ Another factor that constitutes an obstacles for the bureaucracy in effectively implementing policies is the over ambitions nature of some public policies in Nigeria. Some 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. An example of such policies are policies having as their basic objectives the provision of free education or free health services to all the citizens or the total eradication of poverty amongst the citizens. For such policies, there are usually inadequate resources (men and materials) for the public bureaucracy to effectively implement them. For instance, the policy of free education and free health services for all in some states in Nigeria have witnessed such very ineffective implementation resulting in deterioration in quality and standard of service that some people prefer to send their children to private primary and secondary schools and to seek medical services from private hospitals, even though their service fees are very high.

➤ Another critical factor inhibiting effective implementation of policies 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, 1996). 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 (Mankinde, 2005). In Nigeria, the National Poverty Alleviation Policy, for instance, is brilliantly articulated but yet to realize its essence due largely to inadequate fund or resources (Nweke, 2006).

On the issue of inadequate human resources, the public bureaucracy in Nigeria do not, indeed, have adequate staff in terms of over all numbers and more importantly in terms of specific areas of professional, technical or managerial competence and expertise (Aluko and Adesopo; 2002). This is counter productive as the capabilities of government bureaucracy in terms of expertise and skill determine, to a large extent, policy implementation success or failure (Ikelegbe, 1996). Where abilities exist, policies could be confidently formulated with reasonable assurance of their effective implementation. Indeed, as Nnamdi (2001) notes, development 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, 1980; Anikeze, 2011). 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 favourably disposed towards a policy, they may not approach its implementation with the enthusiasm and zeal that its effectively implementation may require. Mankinde (2005), in this respect, contends that the zeal with which bureaucrats in Nigeria

implement policy depends on how they see the policy as effecting 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 policies that makes the realization of their goals and objectives difficult. Indeed, some policy implementing agencies or bureaucracy in Nigeria posses certain primordial interests or values that dissipate implementation favor and clog, delay, distort and mar proper and effective policy implementation. Ugo and Ukpere (2011) note that some policies in Nigeria, because of sectional or personal interests of the bureaucrats, are implemented in negative and particularistic manners or ways.

➤ Another constraining factor to effective policy implementation in Nigeria is undue pervasive political influence on the public bureaucracy (Amucheazi 1980; Aneze) (in Timi and Tola, 1986). 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.

➤ Finally, 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, 2001). 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 personalistic 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. An instance of this tendency for a succeeding regime to discontinue the implementation of the policy of a predecessor was the abrogation of the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) policy of General Olusegun Obasanjo and introduction of Green Revolution by Alhaji Shehu Shagari who succeeded him. When General Mohammed Buhari came into power, he also discontinued the implementation of the Green Revolution introduced by Alhaji Shehu Shagari and introduced "Go back to land policy". When General Ibrahim Babaginda took over government, he again abandoned the policy of "Go back to Land" and introduced the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI). It is note worthy that the various policies as were respectively abrogated and introduced,

had as their basic goals or objectives, to make Nigeria self sufficient in food production and to curtail food importation (Egeran, 2011). The changes and discontinuities were, therefore, very unnecessary and unproductive as it only reflected the political leaders selfish desire to associate policies distinctively and nominally with their government leadership.

1.1.1: Ways to achieve enhanced effectiveness in policy implementation by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria

One, there needs to come into existence a focused, responsible and purposeful political leaderships at the heads of the various government tiers (Federal Government, State Government and Local Governments).and the emergence of honest and dedicated bureaucratic leaderships at the heads of public organization or public bureaucracies. It is expected that the democratization process in Nigeria will aid and hasten the coming into existence of such visionary and purposeful leaderships that will be more inclined to developing appropriate policies to address Nigeria's problems and such policies that can be effectively implemented by the Nigerian public bureaucracy.

Two, Government need to embark on a programme for improving working conditions of the public bureaucrats as this will help to build their morale, dedication and commitment to implementing policies. Specifically, an improvement in pay packages will, for instance, significantly diminish the corruption tendencies among the public bureaucrats in Nigeria and hence allow for the proper use of allocated fund for implementing policies.

Three, there is also the need for a conscious effort by government leadership to reduce the extent to which politics infiltrates bureaucratic activities in Nigeria. This will ensure that bureaucrats in authority are allowed to exercise real control and authority and to be able to function freely and apply some basic ideals of weberian model of bureaucracy in their administrative processes and procedures. Such will, indeed, allow for more effective functioning of the public Nigerian bureaucracy.

Four, the culture of discontinuity of policies in cases of changes in government or organizational leadership should be discouraged. Specifically, we recommend that the National and the State Assemblies should enact a law that will gurarantee continuity of policies made forwards growth and development. This is necessary because, even though government comes and goes, the public bureaucracy remains and should continue the implementation of existing policies unless fundamental developments render their continued implementation impossible or unnecessary. Indeed, if every leader hat comes into position puts aside the ones in place before their tenure, Nigeria will never grow.

Conclusion

The overall objective of every government is to bring about a qualitative improvement in the standard of living of its citizens and to promote growth and development generally. Realizing these noble objectives entails not only the formulation of policies but also the effective implementation of such formulated policies by the public bureaucracy. Given the number of policies that have been formulated in Nigeria since independence, the nation is supposed to have witnessed tremendous levels of social, economic and political development. The reverse has, however, been the case and this underscores the fact that there has not been effective implementation of those policies by the public bureaucracy in Nigeria. In essence, there has been a wide gap between the development goals of a policy at the formulation stage and the realization of such goals on implementation. To close this ever-widening gap, there is the need for enhancement in the extent to which the public bureaucracy in Nigeria effectively implements policies. For the realization of this enhancement, the recommended measures need to be considered and or adhered to in the course of policy implementation activities of the public bureaucracy. It is expected that with such, public bureaucracy could become the veritable instrument of effective policy implementation and as such an, agent of change and development in Nigeria as it is in the developed nations of the world.

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