The Panacea to the Persistent Problem of Public Policy Formulation in the Nigerian Public Sector

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Abstract

The environmental that we live in is growing more complex by the day, thereby making the general saying that the only thing constant in life is change. These changes, have affected everything in our world ranging from the food we eat to modern technology evolving every day. Thus have affected the way and manner government institutions make policies in response to the pressure from the society. The main focus of this work is to examine some problems of public policy making in Nigeria's public sector. This paper argues from the point of view that most problems encountered by Nigeria's public sector particularly at times of making public policies include: the embarking on over-ambitious public policies, lack of leadership capability to make sound policies. Inaccurate identification of causes of a problem to be solved with public policy as well as high demands for policy output from the citizenry due to the complexity of their environment. This paper further recommends that the public sector in Nigeria should adopt and adhere strictly to mostly bottom-up approach at time of policy making and also make continuous training of top public officials particularly on policy making a priority.

Keywords: Nigeria, policy, public policy, public sector, policy making, corruption.

Introduction

It there is one single statement that describes the state of public policy making across the world, it is that they are ridden with problems. Problems pervade the entire policy making process, undermine and pervert the output, outcomes and impact of public policies. Thus, public policies are characterized by poor performance, dismal failures and failed expectations (Fesler, W, 1980:256). It is upheld by some scholars of public administration that many public policies are ineffective, too expensive for what they accomplish, achieve

poor result and outcomes, have largely unintended impacts and questionable worth (Fesler, W. 1980:256). This point of view was also supported by Robert Levine (1972:80) when he noted that the main trouble with public policy has been the complete nature of public administration.

The thrust of this paper is to attempt an examination of the problems of public policy making in Nigeria's public sector. The central question that arises at this point is: what are the problems of most public policies made by Nigeria's public sector. An attempt shall be made to identify the problem and proffer solutions

Conceptual Clarifications

Policy:

In its simplest term given by Ikelegbe (2006:1) is defined as "actions taken or to be taken and actions not taken or not to be taken by government or private organization". It could also be defined as established rules put in place to guide one's actions in response to certain challenges or issues on how to go about such challenges.

Public Policy:

In the words of Carl Friedrich the concept public policy is defined "as the proposed course of action of the government or one of its divisions". But in a summarized form "public policies is what government choose to do or not to do" Ikelegbe (2006:3). Finally, public policy could be defined as those decisions as well as actions government takes in response to public issues which it governs.

Over-Ambitious and Unrealizable Policy Goals: Adopted By the Nigerian Public Sector

Highly ambitious policies adopted by the public sector that are over ambitious when formulated are usually more likely not to meet set goals and objectives and even more difficult to implement than policies that are within a sizeable and achievable range. In the Nigerian public sector today fundamental and sweeping policies embarked upon are usually beyond might and strength of such public sector (Egonmwan 2001:10). These difficulties may arise as a result of lack of appropriate institutional and organizational framework, human and technical resources and the political will to make such a policy succeed (Egonmwan 2001: 10). For example the Edo state government under the Lucky Igbinedion administration, the government made a policy to dredge the Ikpoba River located in Benin city the state capital. With the plant to make it ferrable for by ships as well as creating a sea port in the state capital. This project consumed huge chunk of the state treasury with no reasonable success. The river dredging project had long been

abandoned by successive government. It will be apt to state that such a project ought to be a federal one not for state public sector like it was done.

Excessive Demand for Policy Outputs from the Society

As the Nigerian society grows more complex due to the development of modern technology, increased awareness about the duties and responsibilities of both the government and her citizens emanates. There has been record of increased pressure and demands from the Nigerian citizens as well as various interest groups placed on the government which is represented by public sectors (Egonmwan, 2001:8) such forms of demand ranges from the request for the provisions of good road network system, steady electricity supply, creation of jobs, health facilities, and provision of steady water supply all at the same time. The dearth of all the above mentioned social amenities have left most of the Nigerian citizens impatient, and have also made them more concerned with quality services rendered. Therefore, government (public sector) is confronted with various tasks which are often difficult to achieve as a result of corruption on the part of public officials.

Thus the increased over-expectation of government (public sector) to provide everything at once, which it could not, have often results in huge disappointment of the Nigerian citizens in Nigeria (Egonmwan 2001:9). For example, the epileptic power supply by the electricity distribution companies, the high rate of insecurity which has taken numerous shapes: kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorist attacks etc. explains the problem faced by the public sector.

It is also well known that some government policies also create problems that will in turn demand governmental solutions. Take the case of the Edo state reconstruction of most major roads with a standing order not to park vehicles indiscriminately particularly at major roads in the city. Of course it has been achieved to a large extent but the problem it has caused has led to fresh demands on the government to create alternative parking space for road users who might want to transact business at these designated no parking zone.

Leadership Problem in the Nigerian Public Sector

The problem of leadership in the Nigerian public sector particularly at times of policy making is becoming more challenging as the society continues to grow more complex, and as the citizens become more enlightened. Hodgetts and Attman (1971:182) define leadership as "the process of influencing people to direct their efforts towards the achievements of some particular goals". A good (effective) leader is "one who knows the way, understands situations and is able to make the right decisions at the right time" (Dakare, 2001:3).

It is widely believed that the Nigerian public sector lacks good (effective) leaders that possess the required educational background for the office they occupy, high leadership skills for effectiveness that is well sought after at times of public policy making for example at a time the Minister of Defense in Nigeria was a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (A Lawyer by Profession) with no intelligence or military training based on our findings (Wikpedia). Such a leader lacks the foundation to make sound intelligence policy that will be effective. Also leaders in the public sector particularly now we are living in the computer age where computer is used for most task or functions, most leaders lacks computer literacy in the Nigeria's public sector (Wikipedia)

Inaccurate Identification of Causation

The analytical capacity of the public sector in Nigeria as a country is weak and his have been compounded by lack of training in policy making for most senior public officials thus have led to the absence of what Yehezkel Dror calls "policy scientists" (quoted in Egonmwan 2001:12). The Nigerian public sector is also over-extended and over-burdened by excessive demands and therefore concerned with issues or problems of the moment and the resolution for such problem (Egonmwan 2001:12). Thus long-term public policy planning is no longer an issue of attention but fully concerned in a hurry to respond to too many policy issues at a time, by so doing the accurate analysis of causes of social problems faced by the public sector to respond to are hardly carried out. The resultant effect of the above is that where the causal factor of problems are not correctly and accurately identified and if such policy made by the public sector are based on wrong causations, there is a high probability of such policy failure. In the same manner, if the likely results of certain public policy strategies adopted by the public sector are not accurately identified, the objective of such public policy may not also be achieved (Egonmwan, 2001:13) put differently if the public sector had identify a wrong cause of problems, the formulated public policy might make worse. Therefore, the public policy may fail because linkages in the physical and social system are not well understood for lack of sound economic, social and political feasibility (Egonmwan, 2001:13). In Nigeria for example. A few years ago, the Central Bank adopted a redenomination policy that included the production of new coins. Such policy was meant to check among other things, the devalued nature of the Naira. However, noteworthy is the fact that the Naira had other crucial issues that resulted in its devalued nature. One of such was the overdependence of the economy on export. To the extent that such crucial issues have not been looked into, then redenomination cannot work.

Instability of Leaders in the Public Sector of Nigeria.

Among the various problems faced by the Nigerian public sector in the discharge of the duties, such as enacting laws, regulate or formulating public policies, etc. the issue of

instability has becomes a very big problem as carefully observed by Idahosa and Ehizuelen (1996:133), stating that the political leadership and policies change faster in the public sector than the private sector because the former operates in a political environment. However, the private sector also operate in a political environment moderated by the public sector" This clearly explains one of the major problem faced by the Nigerian public sector particularly at times of public policy formulation. This has been the main reason why in Nigeria there are numerous abandoned policies either because the initiator of such policy had been hurriedly removed due to new political appointments that saw his/her removal and brings another person who do not like his predecessors idea or policy, this dislike might arise as a result of some factors such as: rivalries, members of different political parties, conflicting ideas about public policies, religion, ethnic grouping etc for example this problem was observed also by Emmanuel O. (2006:94) when he said this constant changes have led to constant changes in public policies leading to lack of continuity in public policy implementation.

Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

One of the most serious challenges faced by the Nigerian public sector when formulating policies/ policy is the issue of bribery and corruption. This could arise at any point of the policy making process. It could be at the early state of policy choice being selected from the policy agenda, it could be at the policy formulation state proper and finally it could be at the policy implementation stage or level. Bribery and corruption have contributed greatly to the failure of most policy implementation in the Nigerian public sector (Makinde, 2005:7). For example, funds earmarked for the implementation of a policy in the Nigerian public sector are sometimes stolen or personalized by officers in charge of the policy formulation or implementation. A good example is the allegation contained in the Guardian Newspaper dated August 3rd 1993 where the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was accused of inflating the cost of tankers bought for the corporation with about 2.5 million naira to quote, Orewa (1997:155);

Much as the idea of purchasing NNPC owned tankers is desirable, the NNPC has not denied the allegation by Chief Martin Ikediash in the Guardian of August 3, 1993 that the corporation is buying the tankers at N6.5 million as against the factory price at Leventis Ananco and xx motors at just N4.5 million.

Much as one would like to say that the policy of the corporation to have it own tankers was a good one, the corrupt practices of the implementers actually negated the intentions of the corporation, the effect of such corrupt practices on the corporation is that it

succeeded in impoverishing the corporation contrary to the goal of the policy made. This is what we have in some of the public sectors in Nigeria

Conclusion

For Nigeria to survive, and live the life of her founding fathers, radical re-evaluation of the Nigerian federation is needed starting with the restructuring of the Nigerian public sector in other to produce better public policy for her citizens, by proposing that most Nigerian public officials should be continuously trained in policy making for them to master the act of public policy making. Corruption also should be discouraged and those caught dealt with to serve as deterrent to intending corrupt persons.

The Nigerian public sector should also try to come up with feasible of achievable policy as well as projects that it can carry out successfully other than formulating huge policy that will only be abandoned later after wasting funds. Finally, the frequent changes of government (public sector) which has also led to constant changes in public policy as a result leading to lack of continuity in public policy as well as implementation for the good of the people

Recommendation

The following recommendation if applied holistically will forestall the problems associated with public policy making in the Nigerian public sector

- **Increased adoption of the Bottom-up Approach:**

It is indeed necessary for the Nigerian government to increasingly adopt the bottom-up approach in consultation prior to the initiation of a policy. The idea here is that the public should actually formulate policies that reflects the demands of the people in the environment they operate and serve. For example the National Youth Policy launched in the early months of 2011, epitomizes the approach (Ekaette, 2001:5). It was true that from conception and initiation through zonal consultations to the final National Youth Summit where the policy was eventually adopted and launched, the youths in their numbers and diversity were in the driver seat (Ekaette, 2001:5). The end result was that a group generally seen as difficult, restive and volatile in other circumstances because the architects of a youth policy which they (the youths) fashioned out, adopted and presented to Mr. President for approval and implementation by government using the public sector.

- **Linking Policy Formulation with implementation Strategies**

Public policy is a mere statement unless it is followed up with a policy implementation strategy in the Nigerian public sector. For it to deliver the dividends of good, unbiased,

non-partisan policy to the citizens of Nigeria, there must be effective implementation. For Ekaette (2001) it is like a factory process chain. If the engine is turned off while the raw materials are fed in they simply pile up, clog the process line and in extreme cases damage the engine. Similarly, any slack or stoppage of implementation creates a bottleneck as policies pile up in the absence of implementation. It is for this reason that a vibrant policy implementation and monitoring unit should be set up in order to compliment the efforts of some existing government agencies such as National Planning Commission and National Economic Intelligence Committee (NEIC) whose focus is basically project monitoring.

- **Tackling Corruption**

The Nigerian public sector should also try to tackle corruption not just only at public policy making but in all facets of our national life.

- **Curtailing Inconsistency In Government Policy**

Governments at all levels in Nigeria are involved in policy somersault. Successive governments have abandoned policies of their predecessors no matter how beautiful such polices may be simply because they do not share the same political ideology or they don't just want to be associated with the activities of the past government.

For Nigeria and her institutions to be strong, there is need for public officials (elected or appointed) to see government as a continuum.

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